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Victor Navasky

BLAIR: MISTRUSTED BUT STILL ON TOP
J.D. Guttenplan & Maria Margaronis

HAPPY 86TH, PETE SEEGER
Studs Terkel

ISHIGURO'S IMITATION OF LIFE
Claire Messud

AL GORE GETS DOWN

WHY HIS TV NETWORK WON'T CHALLENGE THE POWERS THAT BE

by ARI BERMAN

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EXCHANGE

R. O. BLECHMAN

'Playing Fair' at Columbia?

New York City

■ In his attempt to "play fair" Scott Sherman appears to have learned his journalistic ethics from the *New York Sun*'s Jacob Gershman ["The Mideast Comes to Columbia," April 4]. Even the mainstream *New York Times* showed more journalistic professionalism in its coverage of the Columbia University witchhunt when it refused to engage in the kind of baseless character assassination in which Sherman engages.

Without providing a shred of evidence for his profile, Sherman describes me, among other things, as "dogmatic" and as "a man who traffics in absolutes, a man who often infuriates even those who are sympathetic to his views." It is unclear how Sherman knows any of this. Has he spoken to all "those who are sympathetic to my views"? Did they all tell him that I often infuriate them? What are the signs of my dogmatism? How can one even begin to respond to such yellow journalism?

But as if this were not enough, Sherman adds that Edward Said "worried about his young friend's propensity for careless rhetoric—a point that Massad himself acknowledged in his *Al-Ahram* obituary of Said."

In fact, I acknowledged no such thing, as neither I nor Edward Said believed that my rhetoric was "careless." Said was merely concerned about strategy and about my "youthful enthusiasm" (as he termed it) in criticizing certain enemies of the Palestinian struggle, not any alleged carelessness. Sherman's purpose for such baseless descriptions is for *Nation* readers to dismiss my political views as akin to Daniel Pipes's and Martin Kramer's in their extremism, as he presents me as their mirror image. Sherman concludes: "Massad frequently acts out the ['devil'] role by unleashing a steady stream of inflammatory anti-Zionist rhetoric: 'racist Jewish state' is a locution he constantly employs."

My characterization of Israel as racist is not some ideological insult but rather a description of a country that has myriad laws that grant Jewish citizens rights and privileges that it denies to non-Jewish citizens. These include the Law of Return (1950), the Law of Absentee Property (1950), the Law of the State's Property (1951), the Law of Citizenship (1952), the Status Law (1952), the Israel Lands Administration Law (1960), the Construction and Building Law (1951) and myriad others.

This racist character of the country extends to the maintenance of the exclusive Jewish symbolism that Israel deploys, ranging from its Jewish flag and national anthem (which speaks only of Jews) to its ceremonial national days and the practices of institutionalized discrimination against its Arab non-Jewish citizens in every facet of life. I am not sure why Sherman finds this "inflammatory." Would calling the United States during segregation or South Africa during apartheid racist countries also be considered "inflammatory" anti-American or anti–South African rhetoric?

Unfortunately, in his political biases against defenders of the Palestinian struggle, Sherman does not deviate from the historic stance of *The Nation* itself, which in its editorial of September 27, 1993, expressed its enthusiastic support for the now-defunct Oslo Accords and cautioned against "extremists" on both sides who opposed it (let us recall that Edward Said was one of the major opponents of Oslo and that he was no "extremist"), warning Israel that unless it satisfies Palestinian aspirations, the Palestinian victims might very well become Nazis and threaten nonracist Israel: "we should recall how the harsh Versailles settlement imposed on Germany after World War I paved the way for Nazi ultranationalism, racist perversions and militarism. The bitter ironies of such a comparison should encourage Israel and its friends, especially the United States, to satisfy Palestinian aspirations for real independence and sovereign rights."

If Sherman and *The Nation* are the best that American left journalism has to offer, I will take my chances with the *Sun*.

JOSEPH MASSAD
Middle East and Asian Languages and Cultures Department, Columbia University

New York City

■ I thought Scott Sherman's research thorough and his article well written and in general good, but I found his description of Joseph Massad as "strident, dogmatic, proud, deliberately provocative and utterly uncompromising" an unnecessary and unfortunate personal attack. Massad deserves a better exposé of his excellent scholarship, research and teaching. Sherman mentions his writings but does not say anything about their contents and the interesting ideas discussed in Massad's books.

My late husband, Edward Said, thought highly of his work, as evidenced by the blurb he wrote regarding his book on Jordan. Also, before this controversy erupted, Massad's class was very popular at Columbia. Many students who took the course thought the material was challenging and provocative. The class was ranked very highly by the students who took the course, and Massad was nominated for the Van Doren Prize. Why is this fact never mentioned by the media while what gets quoted is only what the attackers wrote?

MARIAM C. SAID

New York City

■ Scott Sherman's article is one of the few reliable journalistic accounts of the systematic campaign conducted against my university over the last three years. Sherman's account is reliable in part because the principal targets of this campaign, to which two of my MEALAC colleagues and I are now subjected, had been given an opportunity to respond to Sherman's repeated and prolonged queries.

It is therefore exceedingly disappointing to see that after weeks of detailed conversations and extensive e-mail exchanges, Sherman still manages to add yet another layer of insult to injury. Writing of the deceitful and slanderous misrepresentation of my travelogue to Palestine by the Goliath Project, Sherman states:

"Dabashi misses the point. What's troubling about the passage is its sweeping characterization of an entire people—"Israeli Jews" or not—as vulgar and domineering in their very essence. The passage can easily be construed as anti-Semitic. Dabashi, at a minimum, is guilty of shrill and careless writing. In panning for gold, his critics discovered a precious nugget, one that he would do well to disown."

As I repeatedly explained to Sherman, if characterization X is attributed to varied people caught in conditions A, B and C, then by logical conclusion none of these people are essentially characterized, but their common condition analytically diagnosed. The passage in question is not a "sweeping characterization of an entire people"; it is a reading of a people's body politics when trapped in a systematically militarized state apparatus. Dabashi does not miss the point. Sherman confuses the premise.

If I were to say that people sitting in a room cannot see properly because the light is dim, or cannot hear well because there is construction next door, or cannot clap their hands enthusiastically because the room temperature is very cold and their hands are in their pockets, I am reading their body language not as quintessential to their presumed race but as the bodily reflection of their material condition, namely the room in which they are sitting. Change their room and all those bodily signs will disappear, and they will see, hear and applaud perfectly

(Continued on Page 24)

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EDITORIALS

Ankle Deep and Sinking

One hundred days ago, George W. Bush was boasting that he had earned "political capital" from the election returns and that he intended to spend it. Well, he did invest in some grand ventures, but the market went south on him, along with the Dow Jones index. Tom DeLay, the House majority leader fondly known as The Hammer, has been taking some hard blows to the head as he tries to perfume over the foul odor of corrupt dealings with lobbyists. Bill Frist, the surgeon/senator who leads Senate Republicans, is looking a bit wobbly, too, as he threatens to launch a parliamentary jihad on behalf of right-wing preachers demanding a Jesus-friendly federal judiciary.

Meanwhile, Bush's great crusade to "reform" Social Security by gutting it didn't find many buyers. His carefully orchestrated democracy in Iraq is falling victim to political realities and a bitter insurgency. And John Bolton, Bush's stand-up tough guy, is being assaulted by fellow Republicans not sure they want someone who tries to destroy people who disagree with him representing us at the United Nations. And gas prices are at $2.50 a gallon. And hourly workers' wages are still falling. And the economy is softening. And so are Bush's poll numbers. A second 100 days like this and Bush will begin to look in danger of bankruptcy.

Think of these events as a salutary lesson in political hubris. Three months ago conservative pundits were discussing whether the 2004 election heralded a historic realignment in American politics—right-wing government as far as the eye can see. Now, Charles Krauthammer thinks attacks on the judiciary threaten "necessary checks" on tyranny, and David Brooks fears the Frist anti-filibuster gambit will destroy the Senate as a deliberative body.

While Bush is ankle deep in muddy ground, however, he will still be President for another three and a half years (barring new disclosures about who was responsible for under-investigated war crimes in Iraq). And the White House is working on fallback positions that may allow it to claim "victory" (the President's handlers have proved adept at redefining the terms of combat).

In these new circumstances, it may be more useful to watch how other Republicans respond to these negative turns than how Bush deals with bad news. The GOP's rise to power was predicated on a most unnatural ideological coalition: cosmopolitan corporate suits arm in arm with rancid right-wing populists. These events are straining the alliance. When DeLay summons a lynch party to go after federal judges, many other conservatives get nervous. And who wants to grab the "third rail" of cutting Social Security benefits on behalf of a lame duck President, especially if Bush loses the aura of lucky invincibility?

Democrats may have learned some lessons themselves—coming to understand that it's OK to talk back to the man in the White House. But they're still capable of snatching defeat from the jaws of victory: At the moment when polls were showing Americans opposed 2-to-1 to changing the filibuster rules, the Democratic leadership proposed a "compromise" with the GOP. Playing insider political deals on a matter of supposedly high principle is not the road back to majority status. The gesture was rejected but is a reminder that a broad yellow streak of accommodationism still lurks in the Democratic caucus. Rank-and-file progressives should pound—hard—on weak-kneed senators until this issue is settled. Backing off in the face of un-Christian zealotry will only encourage the frothers.

Events of recent weeks—the Schiavo spectacle, DeLay's ethical embarrassments, Frist's pandering—have finally awakened Americans to the fact that theocratic legislators who believe they are above the law are threatening to spin out of control. And Americans don't like it. Bush's overall job-approval rating is now at 47 percent, matching his all-time low in ABC News/*Washington Post* polls. This is the time for Democrats in Congress to stand tall in defense of justice, common sense and the Constitution.

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COMMENT

The Nation.

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Blair: Mistrust Grows

London

Outside the La Salette Roman Catholic Primary School in Hornchurch, John Cryer's helpers are frantically inflating red balloons. While the kids crowd round the helium cylinder, the candidate chats with their parents. As one volunteer explains, "Young mothers are a key demographic for us. Labour has done a lot for women in terms of childcare, flexible working, increased child benefits, etc. But women don't seem to be liking Tony Blair." Cryer was first elected to Parliament in Labour's 1997 landslide; most of his constituents have moved to this white suburb from London's East End. Those who are not retired work clerical jobs or at the Ford plant in nearby Dagenham, one of Britain's last surviving car manufacturers. Their parents, says Cryer, voted Labour, or Communist. Judging by the response when he knocks on their doors, he knows a startling number of them personally. And yet he's struggling to retain a fragile 1,500-vote majority over the Conservatives.

A few miles west, in Bethnal Green, where Jews and Communists fought Oswald Moseley's Blackshirts in 1936, Labour's Oona King is also struggling to hold her seat—this time against Respect, the party born of the Stop the War Coalition. More than half the voters here are Muslim, mostly from Bangladesh, living in overcrowded poverty among a scatter of chic new wine bars. Aiming to turn the election into a referendum on the Iraq War, Respect has parachuted in its flamboyant leader, George Galloway—a former MP sacked from Labour for allegedly inciting British troops to disobey their orders. Bitterness has bred violence: King, who is black and Jewish and voted for the war, has been pelted with eggs by Galloway supporters, and Galloway was menaced by a radical Muslim group that says voting is a sin. At an assembly organized by the East London Communities Organization, Galloway's attacks on New Labour brought roars of approval from the large Muslim contingent in the audience; union delegates cheered as King rehearsed the benefits she's won in Westminster for the community. The Liberal Democrat and Tory candidates, both Asian men with decades of local experience, struggled to make themselves heard.

The "Big Tent" vote, which first brought Blair to power in 1997, is shrinking from both sides. In Hornchurch, voters fret about immigrants (though few are in evidence) in the blunt language favored by the tabloids and the Tories. Lynton Crosby, the Tory spin doctor who harnessed resentment of foreigners to devastating effect in his native Australia, calls it his "dog whistle" strategy, designed to reach the instincts, not the brain. The insecurity produced by rapid change in people's working lives—outsourcing, New Labour's support for a more "flexible" labor force, and the decline of union power—makes fertile ground for such tactics. In Bethnal Green the issue is the war, the Prevention of Terrorism Act, respect for Muslim communities; Galloway's rhetoric, too, plays on fear as well as rage. Labour's effort to turn the campaign into a celebration of its achievements in the economy and public services—"If you value it, vote for it"—has met with some success but limited enthusiasm. Across the country, voters feel disenfranchised—and betrayed.

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COMMENT

The Iraq War is a big part of the story, although it hasn't featured much in the opinion polls. More than the war itself, voters resent the fact that they have been misled and condescended to: Even for those who didn't follow the details, the trail of scandals and evasions—the flawed intelligence, the "dodgy dossier," the death of weapons expert David Kelly, the refusal to publish the attorney general's advice on the war's legality—has led to the conclusion that Blair can't be trusted. New Labour's broken promises—on privatization in the health service, on university tuition fees, on civil liberties—have come to seem like symptoms of a deeper character flaw. In Blair's own Sedgefield seat, Reg Keys, a member of Military Families Against the War whose son was killed in Iraq, is standing against the Prime Minister. Jon Lansman, a veteran Labour

Pete Seeger Is 86

*A nationwide festival of tributes to the balladeer and songleader of us all, Pete Seeger, will be held on and around his 86th birthday, on May 3 (for information see www.seegerfest.com). We asked Studs Terkel, who turns 93 on May 16 (hey, Happy Birthday, Studs!), to reminisce about his young friend. As Pete and The Weavers used to sing: "*Tzena, Tzena, *join the celebration./There'll be people there from every nation./Dawn will find us dancing in the sunlight,/Dancing in the village square."*

Some years ago, *DownBeat*, the jazz journal, referred to Pete Seeger as "America's tuning fork." Along with Woody Guthrie, Leadbelly and Alan Lomax, he was the balladeer who stirred up the American folk-song revival in the late 1940s and early 1950s. His influence among the young was so pervasive that it brought forth this thought: When you see a kid with Adam's apple wildly bobbing and banjo held chest-high, you know that Pete Seeger, like Kilroy, was there.

Pete and his wife, Toshi, live in a house he built in Beacon, New York, an upstate town along the Hudson River. His later years have been devoted to the *Clearwater*, as a schooner and an idea—cleaning up the Hudson River, which had through the years become polluted, "dangerous to all living things." He was 82 when he started the river project.

It is hard to think of Pete Seeger as an elderly gaffer, because the boy in him, the light, remains undimmed. It was sixty-five years ago I first ran into him. He and three of his colleagues, calling themselves the Almanac Singers, were on a cross-country jalopy tour singing and creating songs for the industrial unions aborning. The CIO had begun, and how could there be labor rallies without songs? It was in the true American tradition, like the Hutchinsons, a family of singing abolitionists during the Civil War. Some of the most heartbreaking music of that fratricidal conflict was theirs.

That night when I first encountered the four wandering minstrels was a cold Chicago beauty. At 2 in the morning, my wife heard the doorbell ring. I was away rehearsing the first play in which I had ever appeared. It was *Waiting for Lefty*, of course. There, at the door, were the four of them. The first was a bantam—freckled, red-haired and elfin. He handed my wife a note saying: "These are good fellas. Put them up for the night." Putting them up was a rough assignment, even for a Depression-era social worker, what with the only spare bunk being a Murphy bed that sprang from the wall. Freckles announced himself as Woody Guthrie. The second was an Ozark mountain man named Lee Hayes. The third was a writer, Millard Lampell. The fourth, somewhat diffident, more in the background, was a slim-jim of 20 or so, fretting around with his banjo. He was Pete Seeger.

Since then, Woody has died. So has Lee Hayes. So has Millard Lampell. Only Pete breathes and sings, mesmerizing audiences, whether they be Democrats, lefties, vegans or even a sprinkling of Republicans. For sixty-five years, he has held forth continuously through periods known more for their bleakness than for their hope: the cold war, the witch-hunt, the civil rights and civil liberties battles. Pete has been in all of them. Wherever he was asked, when the need was the greatest, he, like Kilroy, was there. And still is. Though his voice is somewhat shot, he holds forth on that stage. Whether it be a concert hall, a gathering in the park, a street demonstration, any area is a battleground for human rights. That is why describing him as an 86-year-old gaffer is not quite true. The calendar often deceives. This is a sparkling case in point.

Of course, he's been blacklisted so many times he probably holds the dubious record, with the possible exception of Paul Robeson, who was often his partner in crime.

Before we hoist one for Pete, let's also remember that he's one of the best choirmasters in the country. He may not have the technique of Robert Shaw, but the result is just as explosive. Imagine an audience of thousands as Pete sings, say, "Wimoweh." As Pete waves his arms gently, the audience reacts as a professional choir might. I've seen a wizened little man, who obviously is somebody's bookkeeper, at the command of Pete become a basso profundo, reaching two octaves lower than Chaliapin. This is the nature of Pete Seeger, who reaches out toward the further shores more effectively and more exhilaratedly than anyone I've ever run into.

Hail Pete, at 86, still the boy with that touch of hope in the midst of bleakness. There ain't no one like him.

STUDS TERKEL

Studs Terkel, the Pulitzer Prize–winning oral historian, is the author, most recently, of Will the Circle Be Unbroken? *and* Hope Dies Last.

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activist now working on Keys's campaign, is surprised at the depth of anger that has been uncovered: "This is a very working-class constituency, so it's not a hotbed of opposition to the war. But there's a great resentment at Blair for not getting into the community—his attitude has been to take it for granted, as he has the Labour Party."

The problem for those who would like to use the ballot box to protest against Blair is that there is still no viable alternative to Labour. In many areas a vote for a third party—most often Charles Kennedy's Liberal Democrats, who on issues like taxes, tuition fees and civil liberties are now to Labour's left—risks letting a Tory in. In the campaign's last full week, both Kennedy and Tory leader Michael Howard have pushed Blair's handling of the war back up into the headlines, helped by the defection to Kennedy's party of veteran Labour MP Brian Sedgemore in protest at Blair's "lies." But the brief surge in Tory support early in the campaign may turn out to have been the government's secret weapon. Howard's heavy-handed harping on race and immigration seems to have crossed a line, even in Britain, allowing Labour to twist the Tory slogan "Are you thinking what we're thinking?" into a deft reminder of Britain's eighteen years under conservatism: "Are you remembering what we're remembering?"

Though it is now clear that Blair has become his party's biggest liability, he will still win his coveted third term. New Labour has made itself the natural party of government—or at least the natural winner of elections. The left may hope that a sharply reduced majority will force Blair to resign in favor of Chancellor Gordon Brown—or into serious negotiations with the Liberal Democrats. But Blair has pledged to serve a full term, and it's not clear that Brown (who maintained a strategic silence in the run-up to war) genuinely differs from his boss on any question except who should be prime minister. The overwhelming likelihood is that on May 6 Britain will wake up to more of the same: moderately progressive economics, slavish adherence to much of the Bush foreign policy and a centralized politics in which the grassroots are neglected and civil liberties sacrificed in the pursuit of power.

D.D. GUTTENPLAN AND MARIA MARGARONIS

D.D. Guttenplan and Maria Margaronis write from The Nation*'s London bureau.*

The Dollar's Doldrums

Pity the once-mighty greenback. Back during the Clinton years, treasury secretaries Robert Rubin and Lawrence Summers ceaselessly intoned the mantra "A strong dollar is in our national interest," and the markets cooperated by driving its value against the major foreign currencies steadily higher. That momentum continued through the first year of the Bush Administration.

But for the past three years, the film has been running in reverse. Bush's hapless treasury secretaries, Paul O'Neill and John Snow, have tried intoning the mantra, but with little conviction and no cooperation from the markets. Between the February 2002 peak and the December 2004 low in the value of the dollar, our currency lost 35 percent of its value against the euro, 22 percent against the Japanese yen and even 24 percent against the Canadian dollar. The greenback rallied weakly for the first several months of the year, but the gain amounted to no more than a few percentage points.

Why? And does it matter to those of us who aren't invested in currency strength as some kind of phallic symbol?

The major reason for the dollar's weakness is the profound imbalance in America's dealings with the outside world: We import far more than we export. The trade accounts slipped into the red in 1976, and the deficit has been getting steadily larger. This is an unusual performance for a rich country, where rough balance or even large surpluses are the norm. Trade deficits are usually associated with countries undergoing impressive growth spurts, like South Korea in its glory days (though the country has since matured into surpluses)—or chronically troubled economies, like those of Africa or Latin America.

When imports greatly exceed exports, you must borrow vast gobs of money from abroad to make up the difference. During the late 1990s, most of our foreign money came from private investors, intoxicated by the New Economy miracle of the

NATION NOTES

Nine years ago, when *The Nation* first went online, we thought putting up selections from the magazine once a week constituted a major step into the world of the web. In the years since, we've started adding fresh content daily, including features like "What Are They Reading?" and online commentary by our editor and two of our political writers—all of which has helped raise the number of visitors to the site to an average of 600,000 a month. The web has also proved to be an effective way to introduce *The Nation* to a new audience; last year 28,000 people subscribed to the print edition through the website.

Now, in an effort to improve the site's ability to extend the message and politics of *The Nation*, and to help visitors be better able to understand quickly what makes us unique, we've made major changes to the homepage and other key elements of the site. These changes, developed with the help of the award-winning design team Brown & Ryan, will debut on May 5. We'll still offer selections from the magazine and all our regular web features. But we're adding a news wire that will spotlight overlooked but important stories on other, mainly progressive sites and some new features, like Wal-Mart Nation. We're also offering, for the first time, the ability to interact with the writers of our online blogs and commentaries.

So whether you're already a regular visitor to the website or a reader who until now has confined your reading to the magazine, we invite you to check us out at www.thenation.com.

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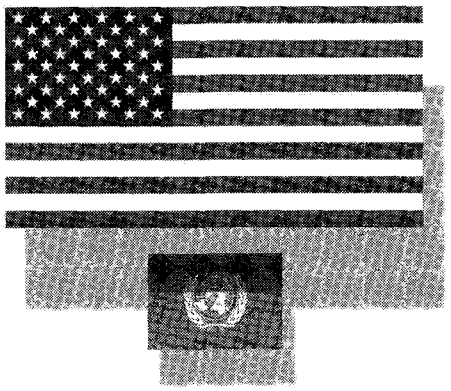
US Meddling In Global AIDS Crisis: "A Triumph of Ideology Over Science."



Intravenous drug use accounts for the majority of HIV cases in China, Iran, Afghanistan, Nepal, the Baltic states, and all of Central Asia, as well as much of Southeast Asia and South America. In Russia, where there are now more cases of HIV than in North America, as many as 80% of infections are attributed to injection drug use.[1]

"A large body of scientific evidence suggests that the free provision of clean needles curbs the spread of AIDS among drug users without increasing rates of addiction," said the US Surgeon General.[2] Needle exchanges have been endorsed by the AMA, the American Public Health Association, the National Academy of Sciences and the World Health Organization.

Despite these ringing recommendations, the State Department just sent a blunt message to the UN office responsible for drug education saying essentially: Shut up about needle exchanges or lose funding. Since the US is one of the major donors to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, the UN quickly folded. All references to harm reduction approaches are being deleted.[3]

The New York Times summed it up: "Washington's antipathy toward needle exchanges is a triumph of ideology over science, logic and compassion. The United States should help pay for these important programs. If it cannot bring itself to do so, it should at least allow the rest of the world to get on with saving millions of lives." [4]

Common Sense for Drug Policy
www.CommonSenseDrugPolicy.org www.DrugWarFacts.org
Mike Gray, Chair; Robert Field, Co-Chair

1. Human Rights Watch, "U.S. Gag on Needle Exchange Harms U.N. AIDS Efforts 2. US Surgeon General Dr. David Schacter, HHS 2000
3. The Observer, Feb 6, 2005, "US Cash Threat to AIDS War" 4. New York Times editorial, 2-26-05

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COMMENT

Clinton era. Lately, the task of financing American deficits has fallen to the central banks of Asia, whose dollar assets (mostly US government bonds) now collectively surpass $1 trillion. They acquire these dollars in two ways. First, when Americans import foreign-made goods, we pay in dollars, which then accumulate abroad. Since there is relatively little that we export to Asia, they don't spend those dollars on our products; they acquire our securities instead.

And second, in an effort to keep the value of their currencies from rising against the dollar, which would raise the price of their exports, Asian central banks, especially China's, have been selling their own currencies. When they sell their own currencies, they get dollars in return—dollars that are invested in obligations of the US government and related entities. As a result of these defensive operations, China has successfully kept the value of its currency, the yuan, unchanged against the dollar—and kept Chinese exports growing mightily.

This gusher of borrowed money—$2 billion–$3 billion of it every business day—has gone to finance Bush's budget deficit and to cover US consumers' penchant for buying stuff on credit. But instead of relying principally on their credit cards for the borrowed money, for the past several years consumers have been borrowing massively against the rising value of their houses (more than $2 trillion since 2000). The ultimate source of those borrowed funds: Asian central banks.

For a long while, it didn't matter. The President was too busy acting tough to notice that he was doing so on someone else's dime, and the financial markets didn't worry much either. The market tone has changed in recent months, though, as worry mounts. Occasional indiscreet remarks from Asian politicians about "diversifying" out of dollar assets have provoked brief market panics. But Federal Reserve officials profess not to be concerned; in a remarkably complacent speech delivered March 11, Alan Greenspan essentially argued that rising US foreign debt wasn't a serious problem because it hasn't proved to be one yet.

Maybe Greenspan's right—though it's disconcerting to recall he spent much of the late 1990s arguing that the stock market wasn't in a speculative mania. It's possible that the dollar's decline against major foreign currencies will boost our exports and discourage imports, thereby diminishing the trade deficit. But our trade deficits with Europe, Japan and Canada have widened despite large shifts in the exchange rates. Though this is counterintuitive, and surprising even to orthodox economists, the reason may be that we don't make much that anyone wants. And the dollar hasn't declined at all against the Chinese currency. The stickiness of the yuan, and the persistent trade deficit with China, has fired up some nationalists in Washington who want to force China to revalue its currency or face punitive tariffs. Such a policy could be very dangerous, threatening global trade and financial flows (and thereby risking global recession) while doing nothing to address our underlying industrial weakness or the American penchant for living beyond our means.

So far, the dollar's swoon has been orderly. But the risk is that the central bankers will decide that they're holding too many dollars—or hyperemotional market participants will surmise that the central banks are about to come to that conclusion—which could provoke a cascade of panic. Investors, domestic and foreign, would dump their bond holdings, causing an interest-rate spike. That spike would send the stock market into a tailspin; stockholders hate rising interest rates. (There are several reasons for the hatred: Higher interest rates raise the cost to professional speculators of borrowing money, they increase the attractiveness of bonds as investments relative to stocks and they generally portend an economic slowdown.)

Markedly higher interest rates would almost certainly knock the stuffing out of the housing market, ending the wonderfully stimulative game of borrowing against home equity, and tip the broad economy into recession. All those millions who'd borrowed energetically on the assumption that interest rates would stay low and house prices would keep rising would find themselves deeply "embarrassed," to use the quaint nineteenth-century term for busted.

That economic unraveling is similar to what happened to countries like Mexico and Thailand when their imbalances reached the breaking point. And the orthodox prescription for a country running huge trade deficits is a deep recession, since a slump would lead to a serious decline in imports. But the United States isn't Mexico or Thailand. We've gotten away with levels of foreign borrowing that would have sunk an ordinary country. Can our luck continue?

It could, but it's not very wise to bet on that. Even if the worst doesn't come to pass, it's still quite possible that some milder version of the crisis scenario could exert a drag on employment and incomes for years. There are things we could do to insure against the crisis or crisis-lite scenarios, like reversing Bush's tax cuts and rebuilding our manufacturing capabilities. Neither seems likely right now. So let's root for luck—it's about all we've got.

DOUG HENWOOD

Doug Henwood, a Nation *contributing editor, is editor of the* Left Business Observer. *His book* After the New Economy *(New Press) comes out in paperback in June.*

CALVIN TRILLIN

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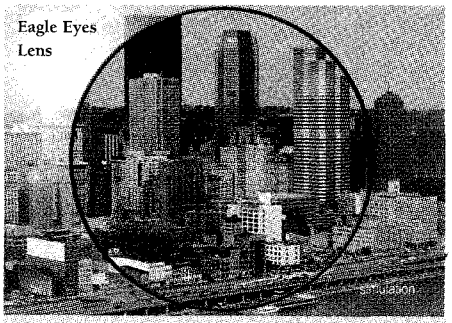

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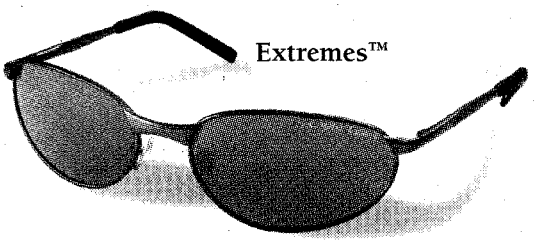

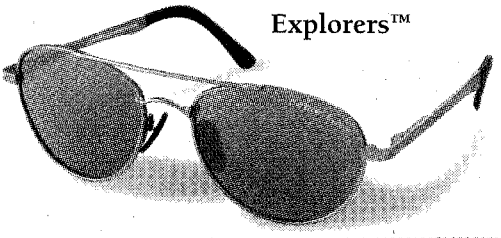

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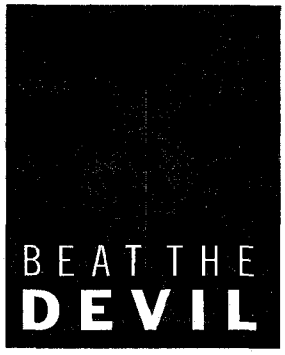
ALEXANDER COCKBURN

Marla Ruzicka, Rachel Corrie and 'Credibility'



Whatever sour emotions I entertained while reading accounts of the funeral of Marla Ruzicka had nothing really to do with the sad death on April 16 of a brave young woman in Baghdad. On many accounts—and I have had a detailed conversation with a close friend of Marla's whose judgment I trust entirely—she was an idealistic person whose prime political flaw seems to have been the very forgivable one of naïveté.

Both in Afghanistan and Iraq, in furtherance of her humanitarian schemes, Marla Ruzicka elected a stance of studious neutrality in ascribing responsibility for the victims of US bombings and ground fire. This pursuit of "credibility" certainly yielded its ironic reward in the political range of those who publicly mourned her.

A US senator—Barbara Boxer—attended Ruzicka's funeral in Lakeport, in northern California. Bob Herbert of the *New York Times* poured out an emotional column honoring Ruzicka, and Robert Pollock wrote for the *Wall Street Journal* editorial page, "America has lost a peerless and unique ambassador."

The sourness in my heart stemmed from a contrast. Almost exactly two years earlier, on March 16, 2003, another brave young woman in a foreign land lost her life, not to a suicide bomber but under the blade of a forty-nine-ton bulldozer made in America by the Caterpillar company specifically for house demolitions and driven by an Israeli soldier, who surely saw Rachel Corrie, clearly visible in her fluorescent orange jacket.

No US senator attended Rachel's funeral. They ran in the opposite direction. The Corries disclosed that after their return home to Washington State with their daughter's body, they contacted their senators, Patty Murray and Maria Cantwell, both Democrats, and told them how their daughter had been deliberately murdered while peacefully demonstrating against a house demolition, such demolitions being violations of international law. Murray and Cantwell, the Corries recall, were quick with expressions of outrage and promises of investigations. The Corries never heard from Murray or Cantwell again.

Cindy Corrie's mailbox filled with disgusting letters abusing her for being a bad mother, and the Israel-right-or-wrong crowd began an unrelenting campaign of abuse of Rachel, to the overall effect that she had it coming to her, that she was defending terrorists who smuggle weapons across the border to kill Israelis, that the International Solidarity Movement, of which she was a member, was a terrorist symp group.

As Professor Steve Niva of Evergreen State College in Olympia wrote on the *CounterPunch* website shortly after Corrie's death, the house of Dr. Samir Nasrallah, which Rachel was defending, "was being demolished because, like dozens of others that have been bulldozed in Hay Salaam, his home was near the 'Apartheid Wall' Israel was building."

And how did the Zionists on Evergreen campus, where Corrie had studied, react? Did Corrie's murder prompt them to any serious reflection on Zionism as Actively Applied in Gaza? No. Niva writes to me that beyond some genuine expressions of sadness for Corrie, the small Zionist groups now felt uncomfortable as Jews on campus, and a few started raising concerns about alleged anti-Israel and possibly anti-Semitic sentiments getting a free pass at Evergreen. They started to peddle charges about the Middle East Studies faculty that there was a "crisis" regarding Jews at Evergreen. Slurs against Niva continue to this day, as they do against Corrie.

Later the magazine *Mother Jones* ran a 7,000-word attack on Corrie and the International Solidarity Movement, which was convincingly demolished in *CounterPunch* by Pran Nguyen, who showed that the article relied heavily on extreme-right sites and sources. Nor was there measured lamentation from the *Wall Street Journal*'s editorial page, which surpassed itself in foam-flecked savagery in a piece by Ruhama Shattan that managed to blame Corrie for the bombing death of three State Department officials in Gaza in October 2003! Shattan's piece had already run in the *Jerusalem Post* and actually prompted the American Ambassador in Tel Aviv, Paul Patin, to write a letter to the *Post* denouncing it as "hateful incitement" and "disgusting abuse of the anniversary of the death of this American citizen." Maybe this letter is what prompted the *WSJ*'s editorial page editor, Paul Gigot, to see Shattan's diatribe as suitable material for his pages.

Marla Ruzicka decided to work "within the system," as they say. Maybe, given the aims of her organization, CIVIC, that was an appropriate choice. I would certainly not want to pass judgment on the matter. The "system" duly mourned and honored her. Rachel Corrie saw that the "system," with all its innumerable and fraudulent road maps to peace, negotiated solutions, Oslo frameworks, processes of peace and so forth had not stopped, nay, was encouraging the daily outrages of demolitions of Palestinian homes and other barbarities. She stood in the path of that system and died. Her murder was covered up by Israel and condoned by the government of the United States.

Across the thirty years that I have written about the vast injustices done to Palestinians by successive Israeli governments, endorsed and paid for by the United States, I have read a thousand admonitions to support what peace plan was in train, to espouse solutions with "credibility." And here we are now, when all the peace plans and road maps stand definitively revealed as the frauds they always were.

Any imagined evacuation of Israeli settlements from Gaza is pure distraction. The story lies in the new settlements stretching out from East Jerusalem, amputating any conceivably viable Palestinian state. In this illegal enterprise, there's no "case for Israel" beyond simple sanction of violent, illegal occupation and eviction. Two years after her murder I honor Rachel Corrie and ask those supposedly reasonable, credibility-seeking voices on the Zionist side of the aisle here in the United States, What have you got to say for yourselves now? ■

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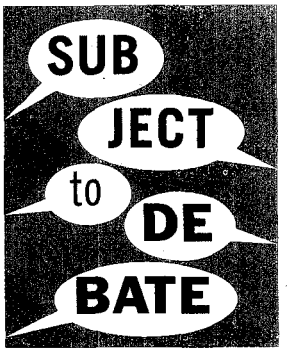
KATHA POLLITT

Practice What You Preach



Pharmacists think they have the right to deny women birth control and the morning-after pill. Senator Frist thinks God wants more ultraconservative judges on the federal bench and if you disagree, well, you know where *you're* going. Forget common ground, it's time to divide up the country. The red-state blue-state map is too crude—too many blue pegs in red holes and vice versa. In the great tradition of American individualism and modern in-depth polling procedures, let's make everyone respond, in writing, to a detailed questionnaire on hot-button "values issues" and then be legally compelled to live by the answers they give. It's a glorious blend of academic right and left—rational choice theory (people make decisions in their own best interests) meets postmodernism (there is no one truth).

Consider what happened in Louisiana, Arkansas and Arizona, where engaged couples can opt for a more restrictive form of marriage. Despite its popularity among conservative pundits and preachers, covenant marriage—which allows only a select few grounds for divorce, like infidelity—has attracted less than 2 percent of marrying couples. That tells us something important about the way people want to live as opposed to the way they think other people should live, and what people choose when they have to live with the results. Let's apply that principle more broadly. For example:

1. *Stem-cell research.* According to an NBC/*Wall Street Journal* poll, 22 percent of the population thinks extracting stem cells from pre-embryos frozen in fertility clinics is unethical. These tender souls have prevailed upon the Bush Administration to restrict federal funds for stem-cell research. This has resulted in a bidding war among states eager to lure researchers, which nobody sees as the best way to do the science. Why not split the difference? Bring back federal funding, but those who oppose it can take the appropriate tax cut. The catch is, they agree to forgo any cures stem-cell research might yield: They'll have to live with their Parkinson's, diabetes, Alzheimer's or cancer, which, since they believe stem-cell research is wrong, is surely what they would want to do anyway.

2. *Creationism.* According to NBC, 44 percent of Americans believe that the biblical account of Creation—God, six days, species created individually in the forms that now exist—is literally true. According to Gallup, 45 percent believe the Earth is at most 10,000 years old. A CBS News poll found that 65 percent believe these versions of events should be taught in school alongside evolution, and that given the opportunity 37 percent would ditch Darwinism altogether. Under the new plan, creationists could continue their efforts to wreck science education and dumb down their kids—but first, they would pledge to abstain from any real-life benefits of evolutionary theory. Flu vaccines, for example, rely for their effectiveness on yearly reformulation to account for the evolution of the influenza virus. No evolution? Achoo for you!

3. *Terri Schiavo–like situations.* According to a Fox News/Opinion Dynamics poll, 24 percent of the population worry they'll be allowed to die if their brain turns into boiled squash. Sixty-one percent fear that they'll be kept alive forever in a boiled-squash state. Under the new plan, everyone signs a living will, to be updated yearly. Those who opt for life are enrolled in the private squash-maintenance program of their choice—Comatose for Christ, Operation Get Randall Terry on TV, Concerned Women for Zucchini. Those who prefer a quick exit go off in a delightful NORML-funded haze of controlled substances—they'll be totally unaware of it, unfortunately, but it's a nice thought.

4. *Teen sex.* Every school will offer both abstinence-only and comprehensive sex ed—parents can sign their kids up for the course they prefer. In states with notification/consent laws, parents will remain free to discourage or prevent their daughters from having abortions. The catch is, if they choose this route, they are legally responsible for the total financial support through college of the babies their underage daughters produce. After all, if a girl is too young to learn about birth control, too young to have sex and too young to decide on her own to have an abortion, she's obviously too young to be a mother. Having made the choice for her, the parents should bear the consequences. If they don't like this system, they can try to extract child support from the baby's father (or his parents), and good luck to them.

5. *Capital punishment.* Against it? Should you be convicted of murder or the like, instead of lethal injection you get a long stay at a Swedish-style prison with college classes, a salad bar and condom dispensers in every shower room. Pro-death penalty? Uh-oh: there's Sister Helen Prejean. Your appeal must not be going well. You should have more carefully evaluated your propensity for mayhem and/or the fallibility of the justice system.

6. *English only.* Do you blow a gasket when your ATM asks you if you'd like to bank *en español*? Check the English-only box, and get priority on tract housing in Utah or Idaho. But first, just to make sure your own linguistic skills do justice to the language of Shakespeare, Woolf and Baldwin, you'll be enrolled in a free, intensive, yearlong literature class taught by brilliant, dedicated, culturally conservative professors who firmly believe they failed to get tenure at Ivy League universities because of their resistance to grade inflation and what passes for education these days. Less than a B sends you back to the land from which your ancestors most recently escaped.

7. *The judiciary.* Guardians of liberty or power-hungry perverts? Maybe a little of both? If you think the courts should say what's constitutional, your lawsuits get decided by judges and, yes, that includes Antonin Scalia. If you think judges have too much power, so be it: Your lawsuits go before a panel made up of marital counselors, rational choice theorists, postmodernists and the people who decide whether your HMO covers your hospital bills.

Check your mailbox for the values questionnaire, and think very, very carefully about your answers. For the first time in history, you will be stuck with them. ■

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ARTICLES

AL GORE GETS DOWN

by ARI BERMAN

During a town hall meeting on MTV in 2000, Al Gore dismissed a question about the rapper Mos Def. Throughout his career, Gore viewed hip-hop music, even when practiced by a politically conscious artist like Mos Def, as an undignified form of political expression. "Gandhi once said you must become the change you wish to see in the world," Gore said of hip-hop. "I don't think it's good enough to say, 'Well, we're just reflecting a reality.'"

Five years later, on a spring night in San Francisco, none other than Mos Def was anchoring the prelaunch party for Gore's new youth cable channel, Current, reflecting a reality of a different sort—that of the television business, where hipness trumps values. Gore was there too, trying to pump up enthusiasm for what he claims will be an entirely new approach to news and culture. Looking bulky but relaxed, Gore asked the diverse young crowd, "How many of y'all would like to see an opportunity to talk about what's going on in your world that you can participate in with television?"

Current screened three video clips as evidence of what the network plans to offer: the first a high-speed montage, created by a team of producers, freelancers and the audience itself, touching on everything from poppy fields in Morocco to hacking into Paris Hilton's cell phone; the second, a twice-hourly news update spotlighting the top ten queries on Google for any given subject; and the third, winner of a $10,000 submission prize, a satire of political campaign ads that came across as an amateurish stab at *The Daily Show With Jon Stewart*.

Reactions were lukewarm at best. "It's the same references you see on any other channel," said 26-year-old activist Julian Davis. "When did Google become alternative media?" asked 22-year-old filmmaker Jennie Heinlein.

Comments like these suggest that what Current has become is quite different from the vision Gore and his partner, Joel Hyatt, started with. What began as an effort to challenge Rupert Murdoch and the right-wing domination of the corporate media has transformed into a business proposition to lure a youth audience with lofty rhetoric, new technology and pop-culture content. Gore and Hyatt didn't have TV experience, so they ceded creative control to industry people who did. Along the way, "democratizing" the media—their buzzword from the get-go, which they described as giving space to ordinary young people—became more important than politics or elevating television's dismal content. What emerges on August 1, Current's launch date, could resemble an interactive grad-school version of MTV. Current may still improve youth television and usher in a wave of new technology, but it isn't likely to change the media, or the world.

"Less and less they're trying to run a company with a social mission," says Orville Schell, dean of the Berkeley School of Journalism and a member of Current's board of directors. "They want something that's new and interesting and economically viable."

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After the 2000 election, Gore became increasingly concerned about the conservative shift in the press. While teaching at the Columbia School of Journalism, he invited Rupert Murdoch to discuss the corporate consolidation of the media. Around the same time, Gore was helping his old Democratic fundraiser Joel Hyatt, an influential lawyer and entrepreneur who teaches business at Stanford University, to try to buy *The New Republic*. When the deal fell through, their attention turned to the concept of starting a high-end political website for progressives.

"The idea didn't have a business model," Hyatt says. "Both of us, having spent 2000 fundraising, didn't feel like once again asking our friends for money." They explored different media possibilities and hired Jamie Daves, who ran youth outreach for Bill Clinton in 1992 and served as a senior official at the Federal Communications Commission. Cable television, which Gore dubs "the dominant medium of our time," became the most appealing avenue, offering two revenue streams, from advertisers and subscribers. As they queried friends in the industry for advice, Gore and Hyatt kept hearing the same refrain: There is no market on TV for a liberal channel. No one will watch it. No advertiser wants it. No cable operator will put it on the air. So they turned to an emerging demographic that appealed to both advertisers and visionaries. Twentysomethings were defining their buying habits, coming into their own politically and were underserved creatively on television. The decision was made to launch a youth network. Gore, through a spokesman, declined to comment for this article.

Current backer Rob Glaser says he invested because he thinks 'Al Gore is smart and determined and will create a big success.'

Hyatt and Gore knew cable would be a tough market to crack. The most popular television shows for the 18-to-34 demographic today, according to Brad Adgate at Horizon Media, are *American Idol*, *Desperate Housewives*, *Apprentice 2*, *CSI*, *ER* and *Survivor*. *The West Wing* ranks ninetieth, two spots ahead of *60 Minutes*. The only network to attract and hold young viewers consistently has been MTV. "Young people trust what they get from MTV more than any other source," says Jehmu Green, president of Rock the Vote. "It's an opportunity for Current to be the competitor and tap into those not watching MTV." In fact, the channel decided to aim at MTV's elder graduates, according to Annie Zehren, Current's head of marketing.

In fall 2002, Gore and Hyatt summoned leaders in media, technology and finance to brainstorm programming ideas at San Francisco's Global Business Network, an incubator for outside-the-box thinking. Gore had been influenced by an MTV show in the mid-1990s called *UNfiltered*, which consisted of short personal narratives solicited by MTV and created by the audience. The subject matter ranged from Christian rock music to single mothers on heroin, but nearly all of it was raw, enthralling and new. Yet some participants at the gathering wondered if Gore's enthusiasm for grassroots television was authentic. "They [Gore and Hyatt] said they wanted 'genuinely bottom-up media,'" recounts Douglas Rushkoff, a new-media critic. "I kept thinking, Do you wanna do this or do you wanna do something that looks like this?" Rushkoff and others envisioned MoveOn.org in prime time: TV that could make civic affairs cool.

Gore and Hyatt, at Daves's suggestion, recruited Michael Rosenblum, the father of video journalism, to execute their plan and agreed to hire a cadre of fifty digital correspondents who'd form the backbone of the new network. Shortly thereafter, in May 2004, they acquired Newsworld International (NWI) from Vivendi Universal for a reported $70 million, and tentatively titled it INdTV. The network reached a slim 17 million US households, but it gave Gore and Hyatt a launching pad. The twenty investors were exclusively friends of Gore and Hyatt, including Bradley Whitford, Melvin and Bren Simon, Albert Dwoskin, Warren Lieberfarb, Rob Glaser, Bill Joy, Bob Pittman and two California-based equity capital firms, Yucaipa Companies and Blum Capital Partners. The investors, many of them Democratic heavyweights, had various motivations for investing. Some thought they were getting a good deal on a network and wanted to be in a position to grab eyeballs at a cheap price if the venture failed. Others were doing Al and Joel a favor and thought the venture had a decent chance of succeeding. A third group had a larger social or political mission in mind. "People invested out of the belief we were doing something that had the potential to be valuable and important," Hyatt says. Glaser, CEO of the online multimedia company RealNetworks and a major Democratic donor, said through a spokesman that he "invested because he thinks Al Gore is smart and determined and will create a big success."

The investors will have to play an instrumental role if Current hopes to succeed in a market where five conglomerates determine virtually all of youth culture. Hyatt insists Current has the financial wherewithal to duke it out with the big boys, but it won't reveal which cable operators he's met with, how much money Current has or how they purchased NWI. "We have outstanding and deep-pocketed investors," is all he'll say. "We're the last—if not, certainly one of the last—independent companies to be launched." Current will start in 19 million households thanks to distribution agreements (known as "carriage" in industry lexicon) with DirecTV, Time Warner Cable, select markets of Comcast and smaller regional agreements. That's a better position than 95 percent of start-ups but a far cry from stable. Agreements with Dish Network, Cox, Cablevision, EchoStar and all of Comcast will be necessary to grow Current into 50 million households, at which point advertisers begin paying attention. Before that, it's a concept sell.

Essentially, Current will premier without a constituency. "Fox News is the only one who's really gained an audience [recently]," says Tom Wolzien, a media analyst at Sanford C. Bernstein & Co. "It's a tough go these days. You need to get distribution and then have enough money to put content on the screen that people will watch and then hope the advertisers will come." Time Warner is urging prospective start-ups to forget about 24/7 channels and move solely to on-demand programming. "The gale-force winds of the marketplace is the single

Ari Berman, who writes The Nation*'s Daily Outrage weblog, is a Ralph Shikes Fellow at the Public Concern Foundation. He recently wrote about the rise and fall of the Democratic Leadership Council for the magazine.*

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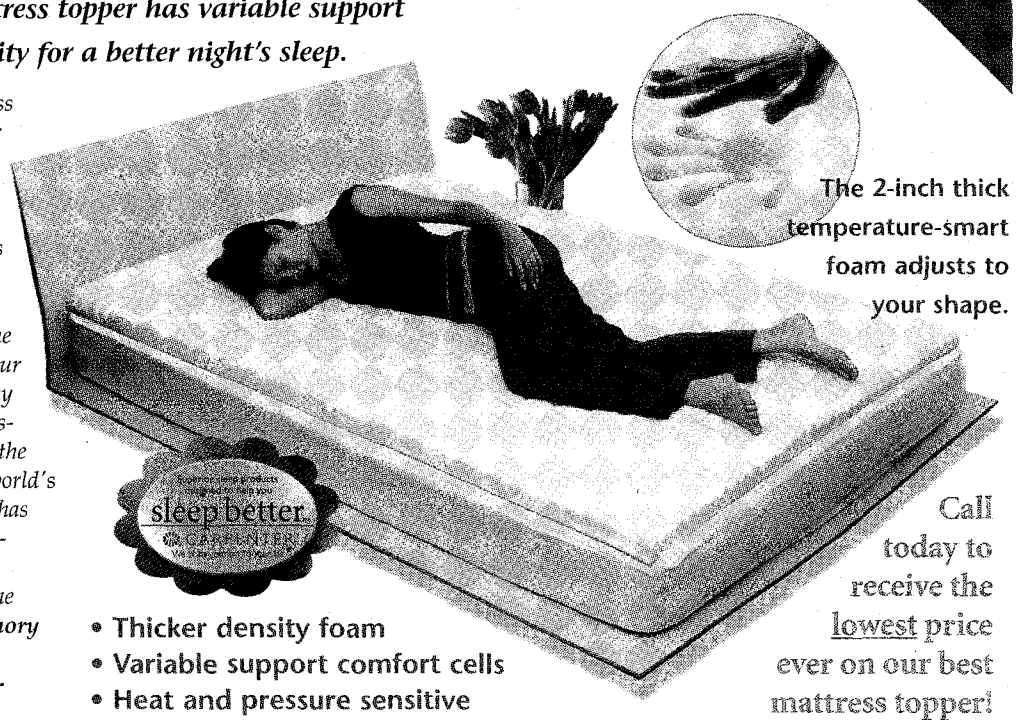

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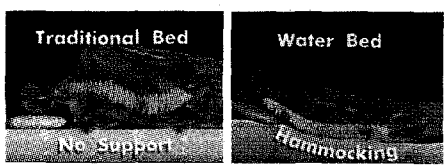

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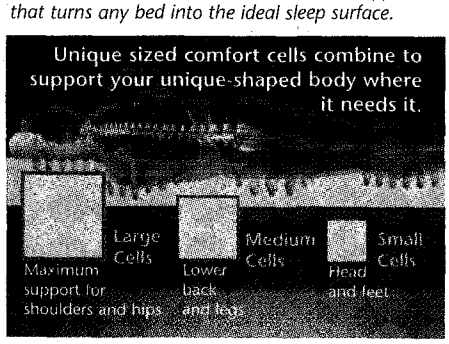
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most important dynamic that everyone in this industry has to deal with," Schell says. "Current is going to be no exception."

In fall 2004 the decision of whom to hire as the network's top staff began to refashion INdTV's identity away from substantive news and commentary and toward slick, MTV-style youth packaging. The new head of programming, David Neuman—the former programming chief for CNN who recruited Paula Zahn, Anderson Cooper and Soledad O'Brien and started as a fellow in the Reagan White House—seemed like an old-school industry insider. The new head of marketing, Annie Zehren, had launched *Teen People* magazine. The new COO, Mark Goldman, had run Latin American operations for Rupert Murdoch's Sky News. As Gore and Hyatt relinquished creative control, Daves and Rosenblum were quickly let go. Social change was out, running a successful new network was in.

In December 2004, INdTV unveiled a batch of programming themes, including "That's F*&^#ed Up," "Addiction" and, most memorable, "INdTV Paparazzi: Get someone famous to opine on something substantive. (Hey, Paris [Hilton]—what did you think of Rumsfeld's quote on the armored Humvee shortage in Iraq?)." One unsuccessful digital-correspondent applicant, former TechTV intern Tim Lang, described INdTV's vision as "Amorphous Revolution. The overthrow of nothing in specific."

Gore says that 'when this medium is connected to the grassroots storytellers that are out there, it will have an impact' on what's discussed.

On April 1 INdTV transformed into Current and publicly resurfaced for a preview press screening at its stylish two-story headquarters—exposed brick walls and beams, wood floors, modern and minimalist art. Flat-screen TVs everywhere glowed with Current's new logo, four green squares reminiscent of a Josef Albers painting. Gore, wearing a gray suit, open black-collared shirt and black cowboy boots, amiably opened the press conference and reiterated what his network was not. "We have no intention of being a Democratic channel, a liberal channel or a TV version of Air America. That's not what we're all about. We are about empowering this generation of young people in the 18-to-34 population to engage in a dialogue of democracy and to tell their stories of what's going on in their lives, in the dominant medium of our time." The programming, Current officials explained, will be a mix of material produced by David Neuman's in-house team of young correspondents, queries from freelancers and submissions from the audience, which Current hopes will be the network's core. At the beginning, viewers will provide less than a third of all programming. But Neuman hopes to ramp up quickly, eventually soliciting a "tapas bar for young adults."

That night, as Current threw a street party for its target audience, Gore hosted a swanky, closed-door wine and hors d'oeuvres shindig at Current's headquarters, visible from the street through its large glass windows. Massaging the industry was more important than meddling with the masses. When Gore finally stepped out to address the crowd, he was trailed by San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom, Leonardo DiCaprio and Sean Penn.

Press response to the pre-launch ranged from skeptical to sarcastic. "Finally a cable network for burned-out stoners of all ages," joked John Dvorak on MarketWatch.com. "Launching a cable channel is nearly impossible," wrote *San Francisco Chronicle* TV critic Tim Goodman. "Not even Gore's unquenchable enthusiasm can change that fact." "This week, I told former vice president Al Gore why his new cable-television venture would never work," wrote *Newsweek*'s Brad Stone. The blogosphere, with its open-source proclivities, seemed more receptive. "If they can help create a generation of citizen journalists and indie mediamakers, they have my full-blooded support," blogged Chuck Olsen, an unsuccessful Current applicant and documentary filmmaker.

Current's business model depends on being different and separating itself from the 400-channel pack. But is the programming previewed thus far—attractive hosts in a "club-like atmosphere"; specials on celebrities, fashion, music, parenting, religion, technology and travel; fast, jump-cut editing for the MTV generation—really that distinct from what young people are already watching? "Politics" is simply another word in Current's programming lineup, not a guiding theme. "In the beginning, when the idea was long-form documentaries—they were perhaps not an antidote to Fox but an antidote to the soundbite broadcast media," Schell explains.

If the marketplace drove the network's decision to go after youth, then youth drove Current toward short-form content. The network likes to think of these one- to six-minute narrative segments, what they call "pods," as the new music video. "It was so consistent with the fast-paced, two-screen-consuming-at-the-same-time nature of this audience," Neuman explains. "This is an audience that has become 'media grazers,' and we decided to create a network that didn't fight that but rather facilitated that." But such a brief window allows for virtually no context, something that most of TV news already sorely lacks. "That's the old question," says Schell. "Do you satisfy what people want or do you try to change their taste?"

Now the audience—Current hopes—is in a position to answer that question, uploading videos, ranking what they see, fusing the choice of the Internet with the quality of TV. Current's online "assignment desk"—where would-be contributors can visit for ideas—contains a few promising suggestions, including "Current Citizen Journalist" ("Shoot a story that traditional news media won't touch because it's too big, too small, or too something") and "Current Change" ("Who's out there making positive change in the world?"). On the other hand, a featured fifty-five-second submission on the website shows drunken claymation figurines puking.

Gore, a geeky guy with a brilliant mind, maintains that the intersection of technology and culture will direct Current in the right direction. "I personally believe that when this medium is connected to the grassroots storytellers that are out there, it will have an impact on the kinds of things that are discussed and the way they are discussed," he said at the press conference. It sounds like a nonideological Dean campaign on television, complete with Current MeetUps. Yet this vision—like Gore's "People Versus the Powerful" speech in 2000—may not last any longer than Gore's earlier forays into populism. Just take one

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look at cable TV news, with its recent wall-to-wall coverage of Michael Jackson, Terri Schiavo and the Pope. "Networks do studies and research and put on what people will watch," says Victoria Clark, a lobbyist for Comcast and a former spokeswoman for the Pentagon. "It's a business." Such are the perils of Current's audience-generated model. If the 18-to-34 crowd really wants to see Paris Hilton, the Gore gatekeepers may be powerless to stop it. At the same time, if media savvy right-wingers test the opportunity that Current provides to air videos of themselves blocking abortion clinics or taunting left-wing Columbia professors, Current may choose to discourage political programming altogether. Opening the gates won't necessarily trigger more sophisticated content.

"What are you talking about when you say 'democratizing the media'?" asks Cara Mertes, the executive producer of the PBS documentary program *POV*, which draws a substantially younger audience than regular PBS programming. "Is it using media to further democratic ends, to create an environment conducive to the democratic process through unity, empathy and civil discourse? Or does it mean handing over the means of production, which is the logic of public access. In that case, you get a shouting match, a bunch of stuff nobody is watching."

Can Current be serious and dignified and appealing and popular? "On air, you're faced with the tyranny of the mass media," says Steve Rosenbaum, creator of MTV's *UNfiltered*, the inspiration for Current's initial vision. "Which is: If you do three pieces—one on the environment in Alaska, one on homeless people in New York and one on teenage girls getting breast implants, guess which one will do better than the others? People, especially those who watch TV, tend to be attracted to less intelligent, coarser, less thoughtful programming."

Current has always been a work in progress, and perhaps never more so than today, only a few months before its launch. One thing is certain, however. Whatever Gore and Hyatt create won't be part of a broader progressive movement reclaiming American media. The more Gore says Current won't be political, the more likely he is to turn off the grassroots activists (and political players) who may have supported him. "They missed an opportunity to trade on that hunger for meaningful participation," Rushkoff says. "They underestimated how far they could've gotten."

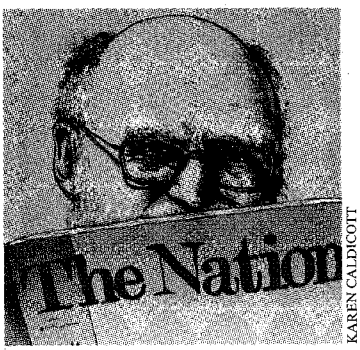
Maybe, in this age of corporate consolidation, launching a viable, independent media company is itself an act of political resistance. Yet one can't help getting the sense that Gore and Hyatt, by buying a network, lining up bigwig investors, hiring industry professionals and courting advertisers and cable operators, ended up doing new media in a decidedly old-fashioned way. Instead of transforming the media, the media business may have transformed them. ■

THOUGHTS ON THE CRITICAL ROLE OF THE JOURNAL OF DISSENT IN AMERICA.

Protest and Survive

VICTOR NAVASKY

On February 1, 2003, just weeks before the invasion of Iraq, I opened my *New York Times* to an article by Todd Purdum of the Washington bureau titled "The Brains Behind Bush's War Policy." From the *Times*'s Washington bureau I expect the scuttlebutt, the inside word from the denizens of the war party. But what Purdum gives us is less inside dope from the inner circle of hawks than outside analysis from *The National Interest*, *The Weekly Standard*, from various (neocon) journals of opinion. He reports their common theme (in articles starting in 1997): "Saddam must go." And the essence of all their arguments in favor of war with Iraq? That the doctrine of containment no longer applies in a post-Soviet, post–cold war world. (Containment, of course, was first set forth as policy in another journal of opinion, *Foreign Affairs*, which published George Kennan's history-making essay "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," under the pseudonym "X," in July 1947.)



KAREN CALDICOTT

So take it from me (or better yet, take it from the *Times*), the journal of critical opinion is here to stay.

Fifteen years after we came in for our share (more than our share) of contumely for inviting retrograde and/or politically incompatible journals of opinion to our conference at the University of California at Los Angeles, I asked *National Review* editor Rich Lowry to lecture at the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism (see how ecumenical, fair and balanced I can be?). But he outfoxed me. Instead of spewing right-wing propaganda, he talked about what our two magazines had in common. He said that like *The Nation*, *National Review* exists to make a point, not a profit; and that opinion journals are at their best when they are fighting for ideas that are out of favor, like the idea that the case for keeping drugs illegal is intellectually bankrupt, an idea on which both magazines concur. (Although I'm glad *The Nation* has given space to the Rev. Jesse Jackson's contention that decriminalization will amount to suicide for the boyz 'n the hood.) When and if the retrograde drug laws are changed, I guess it's true that it will be at least partly because these journals have been chipping away at them all these years.

Christopher Hitchens once traced what he called "a thin reddish thread" connecting J.B. Priestley's article on the nuclear

Victor Navasky is the publisher of The Nation. *This article is excerpted from* A Matter of Opinion, *published in May by Farrar, Straus & Giroux.* *Copyright 2005 by Victor Navasky.*

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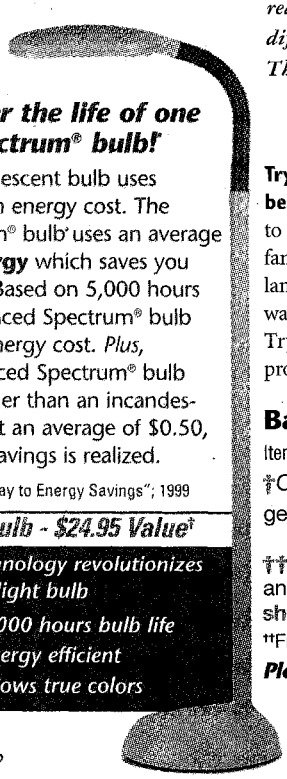

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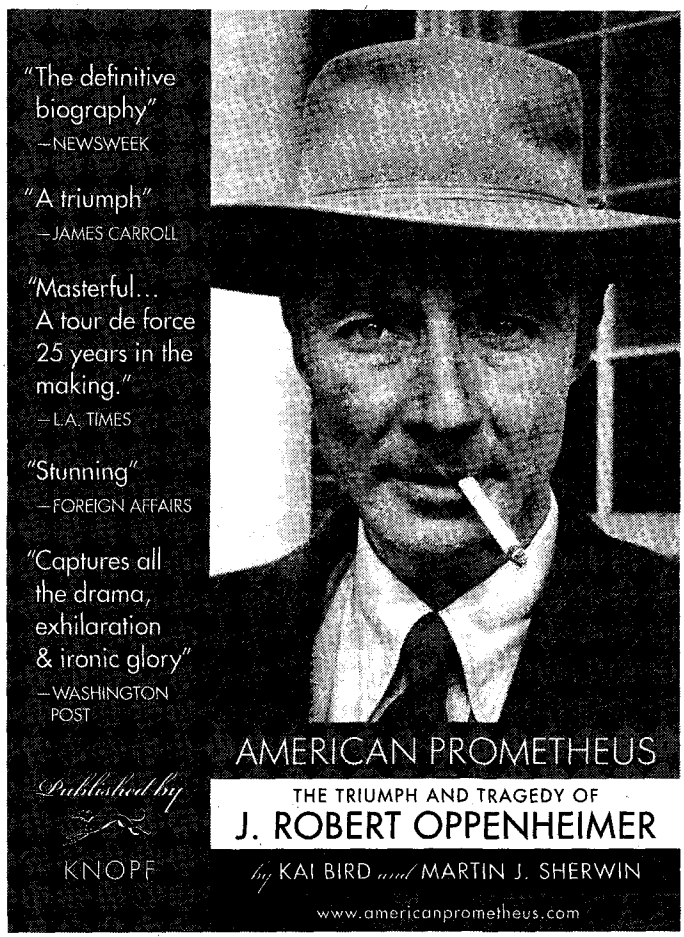

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threat to E.P. Thompson's history-making Committee for Nuclear Disarmament. I don't know whether Thompson would have agreed with Hitch on the role of Priestley's article. I do know that as the British social historian and leader of the European nuclear disarmament movement saw it, by the early 1980s America and Europe appeared to have drifted beyond the range of communication, and the drift seemed to be endangering both continents.

The Nation invited him to send his warning to his American friends—and devoted an entire issue to his message: "We must protest if we are to survive. Protest is the only realistic form of civil defense." This slogan of the British antinuclear movement may have sounded idealistic at the time, but Thompson's confidence that rhetoric could be turned into action proved prophetic. A decade before the disappearance of the Soviet Union and the self-transformation of its satellite East European regimes, he wrote that even though only courageous dissidents will, in the first place, be able to take an open part, protesting "will provide those conditions of relaxation of tension which will weaken the rationale and legitimacy of repressive state measures, and will allow the pressures for democracy and détente to assert themselves in more active and open ways."

I cite these prescient sentiments not just because I agreed with them, and not just because I believe them to be as compelling an explanation for the meltdown of the USSR as the claim that the arms race bankrupted it (although I do), but because "protest and survive" is more than a stratagem. It is a philosophy, and as such describes more than the British antinuclear movement. Indeed, it is as fair an account as we have of the animating force behind the journal of dissent itself. When Thompson wrote about generating an alternative logic, an opposition that must, at every level of society, win the support of multitudes and bring its influence to bear on the rulers of the world, his argument exemplified the case for a truly independent journalism.

Now consider the injunction of *The Nation*'s first editor, E.L. Godkin, not to be the organ of any party, movement or sect. A magazine like *The Nation* can inspire, it can mobilize, it can organize, but in the end it is not a movement, since it is also the job of our journal to deal with—not omit or ignore—inconvenient facts; to persuade, in philosopher Jürgen Habermas's phrase, through the power of the better argument. There is a time to protest and a time to consider, to analyze. To me, this double life, this mixed mandate, the William Lloyd Garrison–E.P. Thompson tradition of protest and the E.L. Godkin–Jürgen Habermas tradition of intellectual debate are not either-or. It is the job of the journal of opinion—postmodernism to the contrary notwithstanding—to tell the truth, and when there is no truth to tell, tell that, too. At least in the case of *The Nation*, although it doesn't always seem that way, the two traditions keep company.

I suspect that *The Nation* has survived all these years partly because it serves no party, movement or sect but also because of its independence, financial as well as political. I believe there is another reason why *The Nation* survives as America's oldest weekly in a business sector where survival may be the ultimate test of success. And it has to do partly with the raison d'être of all journals of opinion, and partly with *The Nation*'s values and ideals.

Protest against injustice, protest against the despoliation of

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the world's resources, protest against the arbitrary exercise of power, protest against prejudice and discrimination, protest on behalf of the dispossessed and the disenfranchised, protest on behalf of those who don't read us are only one part of *The Nation*'s mission, but a critical part.

At first I thought it was an anomaly when Rupert Murdoch and his News Corporation agreed to fund *The Weekly Standard*. Because by definition a journal of opinion, if it is to be politically and culturally free, must also be financially independent. The conventional wisdom tells us that in the world of mass magazines, so-called stand-alones are a thing of the past. Not so in the world of opinion journals, where stand-aloneness seems to be something of a necessary condition.

But then I thought, Well, in the UK the *Spectator*, currently owned by the *London Telegraph*'s communications conglomerate, has survived a series of megacorporate owners. And though like the *Standard*, only more so, it often values style over substance and is too quirky to be circumscribed by a party line, it is nevertheless an opinion journal of the right. These magazines are in the position of defending the powers that be, and so conglomerate ownership, which is anathema to the left, may be organically appropriate to their mission as magazines dedicated to free-market capitalism.

Either way, as *The American Prospect*'s Bob Kuttner has observed, one fundamental difference between left and right is that "the right is always floating downstream relative to economic power. And the left is always heading upstream. That helps explain why the right is always so well-funded. Because it is validating the world view of people who have a ton of money."

Nevertheless, I guess I still subscribe to the idea that those of us in the opinion industry have a stake in protecting one another's space. And if you're not already, you should become a subscriber, too.

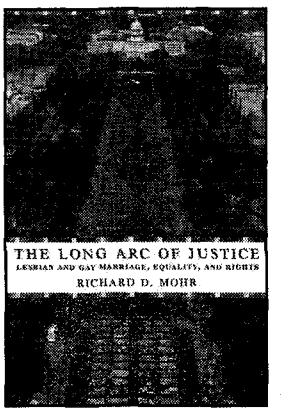
We are told that because the new media quicken the news cycle—that the twenty-four-hour news cycle is now a twenty-four-minute one—the weekly will soon be, if it is not already, outmoded if not outmodemed. To the contrary, what the speeded-up new media mean is that the news is too often replaced by un-fact-checked hyperbole; and thoughtful debate, argument and opinion by shouting matches.

What effect will the new communications technologies have on current cultural formats, artifacts and institutions? Talkies put silent movies out of business. But the paperback extended the audience for the hardcover novel, and neither television nor videotapes put talkies out of business. Will the advent of journals like *Slate* and *Salon* and the arrival of bloggers—not to mention the availability of online versions of thousands, hundreds of thousands, of print opinion pieces in electronic form—negate the need for the classic, stapled journal of opinion?

I don't think so. But then I'm told by my mostly younger colleagues that I don't get it. I don't. It seems to me that despite the benefits, low costs, speed and interactivity of the blogosphere, the depositing of prose in an electronic database cannot compete with the canonization conferred by those old-fashioned print journals, at least not in contemporary cultural terms. That an essay has survived the vetting process of a board of editors on whose political/cultural judgment the reader has come to

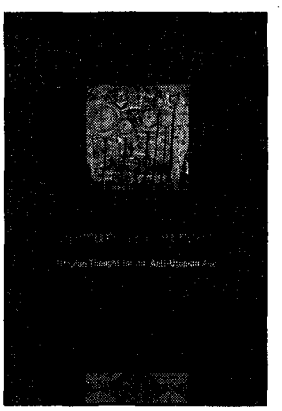
COMING IN **MAY**

The Long Arc of Justice
Lesbian and Gay Marriage, Equality, and Rights
Richard D. Mohr



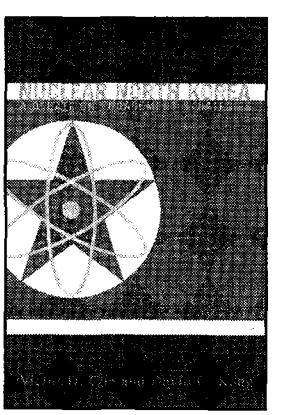
"A vital book for our times... thoughtful in its exploration of concepts, such as liberty and equality, that serve as the moral and legal foundations for gay rights positions."
—Carlos A. Ball, author of *The Morality of Gay Rights*

Picture Imperfect
Utopian Thought for an Anti-Utopian Age
Russell Jacoby



"A brilliant analysis of iconoclastic utopian speculation, especially important at a time when even the proponents of universal health care are decried as obtrusive fanatics"
—Amos Elon, author of *The Pity of It All: A Portrait of the German-Jewish Epoch, 1743-1933*

New in Paper
Nuclear North Korea
A Debate on Engagement Strategies
Victor D. Cha and David C. Kang



"This book is invaluable in thinking through the costs and benefits of engagement or containment. It is intelligent, well-researched, and presents both sides of the argument fairly."
—Fareed Zakaria, *Newsweek*

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rely (though not necessarily to concur in) tells the reader not only how to read a particular piece but that it may be worth the effort. Moreover, one's reading of, say, an Arthur Danto essay in *The Nation* on the end of beauty may be influenced by its being sandwiched between Gore Vidal's requiem for an empire and Katha Pollitt on "Are Women Morally Superior?" (I forget where Katha came out, but of course that is not the point. The unhurried superior quality of her prose, her argument, her moral sensibility is the point. And the rhythm of magazine reading and mulling is the point.) Over the long haul, these magazines provide their own narratives, a long-running moral/political/cultural paradigm complete with its own heroes and villains. Which is not to say there is not room for an electronic republic of letters to supplement its print predecessor.

Perhaps I am a victim of my own mail (not the hate mail, of which I receive more than my share but the other kind). Only today I found this message on my voice mail from a woman who identified herself as a 68-year-old widow: "I need to ask a favor of you. I'm stuck in Abbeville, Louisiana, and I want to move, but I want to move somewhere where I can see a Democrat before I die. It occurs to me that you might be able to rummage up a place where people are actually subscribers to *The Nation*, where I would have somebody to talk to. I don't want their names or anything. I just want a town where there are a few kindred souls." And she added: "If you could call around noon I'd be grateful, I'm about to cut the grass." I have always believed that if Gallup or Roper or the latest public-opinion surveyor asked a representative sample of our readers, "Who are you?" any number of them might answer (never mind their vocation and religion, marital status, gender and/or sexual orientation), "I am a *Nation* subscriber." Just the other weekend in the Sunday Styles section of the *New York Times*, the featured wedding described how one Nina Rowe, the bride, met her groom-to-be. She found him on an Internet dating service under his handle, "nationreader." The readers of journals of opinion constitute nongeographical communities, whose self-identification and links with people they have never met are no less real for that. They are indeed kindred souls. Maybe it's no accident that the social anthropologist Benedict Anderson, who invented and elaborated the idea of the imaginary community, has a brother, Perry Anderson, who edits a journal of opinion, *New Left Review*.

Although last year *The Nation* took in more money than it spent, we're still subsidized by anonymous well-wishers, and what with rising postal rates, rising paper costs, rising healthcare premiums and our inimitable capacity to offend our most generous donors, next year we will undoubtedly be back in the red. More important, short-run profit can contribute to survival, but it is no measure of mission. Every publisher of *The Nation*, and I am no exception, has understood that it is a public trust.

So I end where I began. You need to run one of these magazines like a business or else you will be out of business. But if a business is all you are, you will be out of business, too. As *The Texas Observer*'s founding editor, Ronnie Dugger, wrote in Volume I, Number 1 back in 1952: "We have to survive as a business before we can survive as a morality; but we would rather perish as a business than survive as an immorality." The tension between market and mission is unresolved, although the choice is clear. When in 2002 anonymous Disney executives were talking about shutting down ABC's *Nightline* because it had "lost its relevance," a part of me thought that if relevance is measured by the bottom line, they are right. I was glad to be in the un-mass media. ■

In Fact . . .

HOW CONVENIENTLY THEY FORGET

■ Stephen Zunes writes: Amid the blare of the Bush Administration's alarms about Iran's alleged nuclear weapons capabilities, few remember that the United States, from the Eisenhower through the Carter presidencies, played a major role in the development of Iran's nuclear program. In 1957 the United States and Iran signed their first civil nuclear cooperation agreement. Over the next two decades, the United States not only provided Iran with technical assistance but supplied the country with its first experimental nuclear reactor, complete with enriched uranium and plutonium with fissile isotopes. Despite the refusal of the Shah to rule out the possibility of Iran's developing nuclear weapons, the Ford Administration in 1975 approved the sale of up to eight nuclear reactors with fuel to Iran and, in 1976, approved the sale of lasers believed to be capable of enriching uranium. The *Washington Post* reported that an initially hesitant President Ford was assured by his advisers that Iran was interested only in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. Ford's Defense Secretary was Donald Rumsfeld, his Chief of Staff was Dick Cheney and his man in charge of nonproliferation efforts at the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency was Paul Wolfowitz.

THIS WEEK ON THE WEB

■ Jennifer Washburn, author of the new book *University Inc.: The Corporate Corruption of Higher Education*, files a dispatch from Columbia, where graduate students have just concluded a weeklong strike. A previously undisclosed internal memo reveals that the administration has been flirting with bare-knuckled unionbusting tactics that belie the image of the "liberal" university. The memo is signed by provost Alan Brinkley, who has claimed that "students are free to join or advocate a union, and even to strike, without retribution. " It lists retaliatory actions that might be taken "to discourage" students from striking, several of which would likely rise to the level of illegality if graduate students were covered under the National Labor Relations Act. But they aren't—thanks to the legal efforts of private universities like Columbia, which have successfully argued that graduate students aren't employees and aren't entitled to the right to organize. In the spirit of academic freedom, the grad students disagree, and insist the argument isn't over. Elsewhere on the web, Peter Davis hears from a Vietnam vet on the thirtieth anniversary of the war's end, Adrian Bruce recalls the race riot at the site of Illinois's new Lincoln museum and Max Blumenthal reports on the Christian right's antics on "Justice Sunday." At www.thenation.com.

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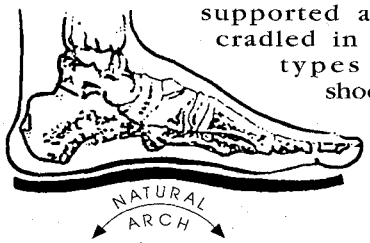
A Foot Specialist in Switzerland knew that, to end foot pain, the foot needed to be properly supported and cradled in all types of shoes.



Since nothing he tried before ever gave long-lasting relief from pain, he set out to solve the problem himself.

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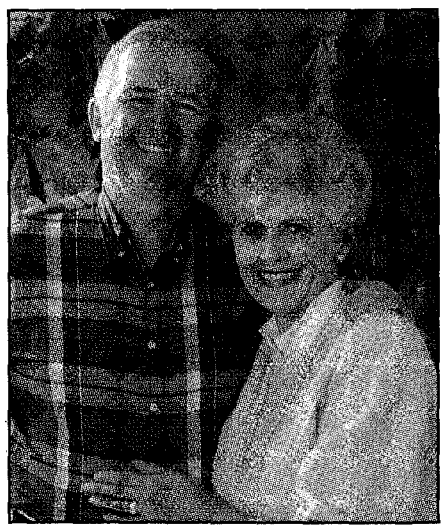
Already, millions of men and women have found blessed relief from their foot pain with "FOOT CRADLES".

"I can hardly believe something so simple could work so well. Now, I believe in 'FOOT CRADLES'! Thank you for ending my foot pain." **B.J. Boise, ID**



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"FOOT CRADLES" slip easily into any pair of shoes you own — high heels, work shoes, boots, sport shoes, sneakers and sandals. They're so comfortable, you won't realize you're wearing them.

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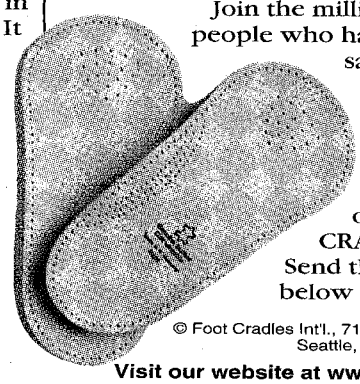

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❑ 1 pair for $16.95 plus $3.00 Postage & Handling. WA residents add 8.8% sales tax.

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$ _____ payment enclosed. Charge my ❑ VISA ❑ MasterCard.

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EXCHANGE
CONTINUED

(Continued From Page 2)
well. This is elementary logic.

Failing to understand that, and then accusing me of "shrill" writing at a time when from Boston to Philadelphia, from New York to Jerusalem, and from the United States to Israel, militant mobs like the one organized at Columbia Business School; multimillion-dollar establishments like Hillel at Columbia; complicitous presidents like Bollinger and Shapiro, supported by their boards of trustees and militant millionaire clubs among the Columbia and Barnard alumni; advocates of torture like Alan Dershowitz; racist propagandists like Daniel Pipes; anti-intellectual vigilantes like Martin Kramer; organized cells at Columbia medical, business and law schools; a bagful of tabloids in Manhattan; Jack-the-Ripper journalists like Douglas Feiden and Jacob Gershman; a deceitful propaganda machine like the Goliath Project; a minister and his ministry in Israel; city, state and federal politicians seeking higher office here in the United States are all ganging up and calling for the heads of two Arabs and a Muslim in post-9/11 New York is quite an achievement for *The Nation*, one that I will not forget or forgive.

HAMID DABASHI
Hagop Kevorkian Professor of Iranian Studies, Columbia University

New York City

■ Thank you for the recent series of articles concerning unfounded allegations against Columbia professors by right-wing, anti-Palestinian organizations. While we strongly agree with most of these articles' conclusions, we reject Scott Sherman's assertion that a passage written by Professor Hamid Dabashi and quoted in the film *Columbia Unbecoming* could "easily be construed as anti-Semitic."

The film, produced by the neoconservative David Project, misquotes Dabashi by deceptively inserting the phrase "Israeli Jews" into a passage he wrote that is critical of Israel. As Sherman indicates, Dabashi never used the phrase "Israeli Jews" in his quoted essay, "For a Fistful of Dust."

In fact, Dabashi refers to Israel only as a military occupier, not as a Jewish state. Dabashi neither states nor implies that Israeli behavior is inherent to Jews, nor does he claim that Israelis are innate oppressors because of their biology. Instead he argues that a militarized, systematically oppressive society has fused to the souls of Israelis to the point of penetrating every aspect of their being. This cannot, in any way, be taken as an extension of the traditional anti-Semitic canard that Jews are biologically inferior or different.

Of course, all generalizations about a people are, to a certain extent, simplifications and inaccurate. The oppression of the Palestinian people is anathema to many Israelis, some of whom have expressed views similar to Dabashi's. As former speaker of the Israeli Knesset and Labor Party leader Avraham Burg has written, "The disease eating away at the body of Zionism has already attacked the head."

JEWS AGAINST THE OCCUPATION
www.jatonyc.org (12 signatories)
WOMEN OF A CERTAIN AGE
(12 signatories)
5 OTHER SIGNATORIES

New York City

■ Scott Sherman's article about Columbia offers a welcome contrast to the horrifyingly, almost psychotically, biased editorial offered up by the *New York Times*. Unlike whatever blind assassin the *Times* was calling on, Sherman listens carefully to both sides and with genuine professionalism tries hard—some would say too hard—to give the student complainants their due. As a result, he at least is fully "credible" when he suggests that the accusations against the MEALAC professors did not amount to true grievances and that the idea of Columbia as a place that's uncomfortable for Jews or Zionists is a complete fantasy. He sees that the real story here is the deliberate intrusion into the university by pro-Israel advocacy groups and the inadequacy of Columbia's defense of its faculty. There are things about which one wishes more had been said, like the value of Joseph Massad's scholarship or the student who pilfered Rashid Khalidi's correspondence and gave it to the *Sun*. But for these and other matters there will be time, alas, as the *Sun* and its murky allies have certainly not finished with their mudslinging. I hope Sherman will stay on the case.

BRUCE ROBBINS
Professor of English and Comparative Literature, Columbia University

SHERMAN REPLIES

Brooklyn, NY

■ Joseph Massad's letter reinforces the characterization of him in my article: He is a man who favors rigid thinking and coarse rhetoric, a man who cannot tolerate even the slightest difference with his point of view. In researching my piece about the controversy at Columbia, I interviewed more than sixty students, faculty and alumni, many of whom have had extensive contact with Massad from the time of his arrival at Columbia.

My description of Massad as "strident, dogmatic, proud, deliberately provocative and utterly uncompromising in his defense of the Palestinian struggle" was not intended as a "personal attack." That description emerged both from my reporting and from my own reading of Massad's written work, especially, but not limited to, the rough-edged articles he has written for the Egyptian daily *Al-Ahram*, which can be easily accessed on that paper's website. I invite *Nation* readers to peruse those articles and come to their own conclusions. I have no doubt that his first book, on Jordanian national identity, is written in a more measured tone, as befits a young professor seeking tenure at a top institution.

My statement about Edward Said's misgivings about Massad's rhetorical style was based on a conversation with an unimpeachable source who was extremely close to Said; that person wishes to remain anonymous. In her letter, Mariam Said does not deny that Edward Said expressed dismay about Massad's use of language.

Since my article went to press, Columbia's ad hoc faculty committee, consisting of five distinguished professors—Ira Katznelson, Mark Mazower, Lisa Anderson, Farah Griffin and Jean Howard—has issued its much-awaited report on the controversy. The report concluded that the primary accusation against Massad—that he lashed out at a student named Deena Shanker during an acrimonious classroom debate—is "credible": "Upon extensive deliberation," the report noted, "the committee finds it credible that Professor Massad became angered at a question that he understood to countenance Israeli conduct of which he disapproved, and that he responded heatedly. While we have no reason to believe that Professor Massad intended to expel Ms. Shanker from the classroom...his rhetorical response to her query exceeded commonly accepted bounds by conveying that her question merited harsh public criticism." Quoting from *The Faculty Handbook of Columbia University*, the report went on to say that "angry criticism directed at a student in class because she disagrees, or appears to disagree, with a faculty member on a matter of substance is not consistent with the obligation 'to show respect for the rights of others to hold opinions differing from their own,' to exercise 'responsible self-discipline,' and to 'demonstrate appropriate restraint.'"

Regarding Massad, the report also noted: "A significant number of students found Professor Massad to be an excellent and inspiring teacher, and several described his class as the best they took at Columbia. But even some of the students who found the class valuable noted Professor Massad's repeated deployment of a tendentious and highly charged vocabulary, and some complained about what they felt was his repeated, even unremitting, use of stigmatizing characterizations and his sometimes intemperate response to dissenting views. Some reported that they were deterred from asking questions by the atmosphere this created."

Given these findings, I see no reason to retreat from my original description of Joseph Massad.

SCOTT SHERMAN

CORRECTION

■ In Eric Alterman's "Bush's War on the Press" in last week's issue, the phrase "like Williams" should have read "like Gallagher," referring to Maggie Gallagher, a journalist paid to promote a marriage initiative.

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BOOKS & THE ARTS

The Other 1905 Revolution

JOSHUA FOER

EINSTEIN 1905: The Standard of Greatness.
By John S. Rigden.
Harvard. 173 pp. $21.95.

THE BORN–EINSTEIN LETTERS, 1916–1955: Friendship, Politics and Physics in Uncertain Times.
Translated by Irene Born. Introduction by Werner Heisenberg. Foreword by Bertrand Russell. New preface by Diana Buchwald and Kip S. Thorne.
Macmillan. 235 pp. $26.95.

In his 1902 book *Science and Hypothesis*, the French mathematician and physicist Henri Poincaré surveyed the landscape of modern physics and found three fundamental conundrums bedeviling his field: the chaotic zigzagging of small particles suspended in liquid, known as Brownian motion; the curious fact that metals emit electrons when exposed to ultraviolet light, known as the photoelectric effect; and science's failure to detect the ether, the invisible medium through which light waves were thought to propagate. In 1904 a 25-year-old Bern patent clerk named Albert Einstein read Poincaré's book. Nothing the young physicist had done with his life until that point foreshadowed the cerebral explosion he was about to unleash. A year later, he had solved all three of Poincaré's problems.

"A storm broke loose in my mind," Einstein would later say of 1905, the *annus mirabilis*, which John S. Rigden calls "the most productive six months any scientist ever enjoyed." Between March and September, he published five seminal papers, each of which transformed physics. Three were Nobel Prize material; another, his thesis dissertation, remains one of the most cited scientific papers ever; and the fifth, a three-page afterthought, derived the only mathematical equation you're likely to find on a pair of boxer shorts, $E = mc^2$.

Rigden's short book *Einstein 1905* is a tour through each of those landmark papers, beginning with the only one that Einstein was willing to call "revolutionary." That first paper, which would earn him the Nobel Prize sixteen years later, was titled "On a Heuristic Point of View About the Creation and Conversion of Light." It could just as easily have been called "Why Everything You Think You Know About Light Is Wrong."

In 1905 most scientists were certain that light traveled in waves, just like sound. Though it troubled few others, Einstein was deeply perturbed by the notion that energy could flow in continuous waves whereas matter was made up of discrete particles. To paraphrase Bertrand Russell, why should one aspect of the universe be molasses when the other part is sand? When Einstein tried to imagine a universe in which everything, including light, was made up of particles, he realized the simple conceptual shift could explain a lot, including the mysterious photoelectric effect. This was typical of how Einstein thought, argues Rigden. He saw fundamental contradictions in the generalizations that others had made before him and then followed the trail of logic to unexpected conclusions. In some cases it took years before his ideas could be experimentally verified. His theory of light wasn't widely accepted for two decades.

Physics was on the verge of something big at the turn of the century. It took an Einstein to ask the big question in the right way.

The second paper of the year, completed in April, is the least well remembered, even though its many practical applications have made it one of Einstein's most cited works. In that paper, Einstein suggested a way of calculating the size of molecules in a liquid based on measurements of how the liquid behaves. The paper relied on more mathematical brute force and was less graceful

Joshua Foer is a science journalist living in Washington, DC. His writing has appeared in the New York Times, *the* Washington Post, Slate *and* Discover.

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than the other four of the year, but it was important nonetheless. Because it showed how to measure the size of otherwise unobservable atoms, it helped nail the coffin shut on the few lingering skeptics, like Ernst Mach, who still did not buy into the atomic theory of matter.

Even more damning for those atomic skeptics was Einstein's May paper on Brownian motion, which explained the unpredictable dance of pollen grains in water. The reason for the pollen's erratic behavior, Einstein demonstrated, is that it is being constantly bombarded by water molecules. Most of the time, that bombardment occurs equally from all angles, so the net effect on a grain of pollen is zero. But sometimes, statistical fluctuations conspire so that more molecules are pushing in one direction than another, causing a grain to zip through the water. Even though atoms are invisible, Einstein had figured out a way to see them at work. "A few scientific papers, not many, seem like magic," Rigden writes. "Einstein's May paper is magic."

Having dispatched two of Poincaré's conundrums, Einstein next turned his attention to the undetected ether; his June paper ended up being the most earth-shattering of the bunch. It demolished two pillars of Newtonian physics, the notions of absolute space and absolute time. In their place, Einstein constructed the special theory of relativity, which held that time appears to stretch and space appears to shrink at velocities approaching the speed of light. The paper had no citations, as if Einstein owed a debt to no one. In fact, that wasn't the case. "Much of his source material was 'in the air' among scientists in 1905," notes Rigden, "and some of these ideas had been published." Physics was on the verge of something big at the turn of the century. It took an Einstein to pull it all together, to ask the big question in the right way.

The final paper, published in September, might as well have been an addendum to the June paper. The profoundly simple equation he derived in three pages, $E = mc^2$, was a logical consequence of the special theory of relativity. Equating energy and mass, it explained why the sun shines and why Hiroshima was leveled. More than anything else Einstein produced, it has come to symbolize his genius.

A half century after his miracle year, in the final sentence of his final letter to his friend and intellectual sparring partner, the physicist Max Born, a dying Albert Einstein wrote, "In the present circumstances, the only profession I would choose would be one where earning a living had nothing to do with the search for knowledge." And so the man whose thought experiments revolutionized science concluded his life posing a thought experiment about himself: Where would we be if Einstein had become a "plumber or peddler," jobs he once rhetorically suggested he'd prefer, instead of a physicist?

One place to look to start answering that question is the science itself, which is where Rigden's book begins. Another is the man himself, whose personality is abundantly on display in the letters he exchanged with Born between 1916 and 1955. Those letters, which first appeared in German in 1969 and in English two years later, have now been republished along with Born's commentary, Werner Heisenberg's original introduction and a useful new preface by Diana Buchwald and Kip Thorne. The Einstein that comes through in the letters is self-aware, philosophical, politically conscious (if sometimes naïve), modest, generous, an aesthete and—in his exchanges with Born's wife, Hedi—an occasional flirt. From these epistolary glimpses of Einstein the person it's possible to see how his science, which "seems to be so far removed from all things human," is nonetheless,

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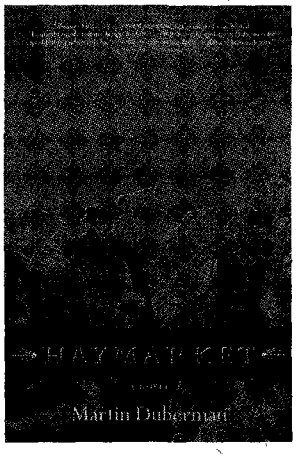

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as Heisenberg writes in his introduction, "fundamentally determined by philosophical and human attitudes."

By the time Einstein began corresponding with Born in 1916, his best work was behind him, and he was already an international celebrity. Their letters document the final chapter of Einstein's career, the forty years during which he was an outsider to the quantum physics revolution and alone in his pursuit of a single unified theory capable of explaining all of physics. Ironically, it was at the height of his fame that Einstein was furthest from the scientific mainstream. The aging revolutionary never ceased to be a radical.

Like Einstein, Born was an assimilated German Jew who fled the country's rising anti-Semitism in the early 1930s. Many of their letters from that period concern the deteriorating political situation in Europe and attempts to arrange teaching posts for exiled German scientists. But unlike Einstein, who perceived an inveterate savagery at the heart of German culture and never again set foot on German soil, Born was more forgiving. After sojourning in Edinburgh during World War II, he returned to Göttingen in 1953. They also differed on their shared Jewish heritage. While Einstein was a moderate Zionist, Born saw no difference between Jewish nationalism and all other embodiments of nationalism that he despised. Their political differences, though, were nowhere near as deep as their scientific disagreements.

Einstein considered Born and himself "Antipodean in our scientific expectations." Born was a leading proponent of quantum theory and was awarded the 1954 Nobel Prize for his work establishing the theory's mathematical basis. Einstein was quantum theory's foremost critic. Even though his 1905 paper on the photoelectric effect helped create the field of quantum mechanics, Einstein could never reconcile himself to its nondeterministic implications. He was adamant that the theory provided only a superficial explanation of the universe, and that a deeper theory would someday be found. This conviction was based almost entirely in aesthetic instincts about what the laws of physics *ought* to look like.

"Quantum mechanics is certainly imposing," he famously told Born. "But an inner voice tells me that it is not yet the real thing. The theory says a lot, but does not really bring us any closer to the secret of the 'old one.' I, at any rate, am convinced that *He* is not playing at dice." Einstein believed that there had to be an "objective reality" at the heart of the universe. If quantum mechanics proved correct, he wrote, again teasing with one of his occupational counterfactuals, "I would rather be a cobbler, or even an employee in a gaming-house, than a physicist."

Their quarrel over quantum theory dragged out for more than three decades, but the content of their arguments changed little from the first letters they exchanged on the subject in 1919 right up until Einstein's death. In a 1953 letter Born declares, "I hope to be able to convince you at last that quantum mechanics is complete and as realistic as the facts permit." His attempt to persuade his friend after all those years seems almost comic. He goes on to call Einstein's stubbornness on the subject "quite unbearable."

Einstein's letters tend to be half as long as Born's and twice as pithy, and are almost always prefaced with an apology for having not written back sooner. Though Born and Einstein only met in person once, they grew to address each other in the tone of lifelong friends. There's no shortage of tough honesty in the letters. There's even the occasional spat. Several correspondences are consumed by discussion over whether Einstein should grant a journalist permission to publish a book called *Conversations*

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With Einstein. Born and his wife were concerned that the author would depict Einstein unflatteringly. "Your own jokes will be smilingly thrown back at you," Hedi Born warns. "This book will constitute your moral death sentence for all but four or five of your friends." Her husband pleads with Einstein, "You do not understand this, in these matters you are a little child."

Einstein replied, "The whole affair is a matter of indifference to me, as is all the commotion, and the opinion of *each and every* human being." Nonetheless, Einstein tried and failed to stop the publication of the book, which even Born later admitted wasn't nearly as bad as he had feared. Einstein's detachment is a persistent theme throughout the letters. He tells Born, "I hibernate like a bear in its cave," and in the same letter he off-handedly informs Born of his wife's death, which he describes as just one more thing accentuating his bearish feeling. Einstein's seeming indifference to worldly things leads Born to comment that "for all his kindness, sociability and love of humanity, he was nevertheless totally detached from his environment and the human beings included in it."

Ironically, the vague constellation of traits that, according to Rigden, stimulated Einstein's early discoveries may also help explain why he spent the second half of his career as an outsider to the quantum revolution. The same aesthetic instincts that led him to recognize the inelegance of the old theories about light and space may have blinded him to the decidedly unbeautiful reality of quantum mechanics. The same "stubbornness of a mule" that kept him on the trail of the general theory of relativity for a decade may also have kept him on less fruitful paths later in his career. And the same self-confidence that gave the 26-year-old patent clerk the audacity to challenge the central precepts of classical physics may have prevented him from recognizing his own failure of imagination with regard to quantum mechanics.

Heisenberg writes in his introduction, "In the course of scientific progress it can happen that a new range of empirical data can be completely understood only when the enormous effort is made to...change the very structure of the thought processes. In the case of quantum mechanics, Einstein was apparently no longer willing to take this step, or perhaps no longer able to do so."

But another explanation is possible. Einstein always held that posterity would value his ideas more than his peers did. He was right. Again and again, work that was at first deemed loopy has been vindicated. The quest for a unified theory, once an emblem of Einstein's isolation, has become contemporary physics' Holy Grail. It's possible that Einstein's greatest intellectual gamble, his repudiation of quantum theory, may yet prove as prescient. Indeed, though they are a minority, many highly regarded scientists still harbor the deep discomfort that Einstein felt about quantum theory. In a 1944 letter to Born on the subject, Einstein wrote, "No doubt the day will come when we will see whose instinctive attitude was the correct one." That day may yet be some time off. ■

Love's Body

CLAIRE MESSUD

NEVER LET ME GO. By Kazuo Ishiguro. Knopf. 288 pp. $24.

Kazuo Ishiguro is a writer renowned for his capacity to create beautifully controlled surfaces and to beautifully evoke the roiling emotions beneath them. Most famously, of course, the voice of the butler Stevens in *The Remains of the Day* is a triumph of nuance and subtle unreliability: Here is a speaker whose apparently mundane obsessions with the qualities of a great butler and the importance of the proper polishing of silver mask his inner torments. Indeed, beneath his stiff upper lip, Stevens has come in later years to question not only his choices but the foundation upon which they were based.

In subsequent novels, Ishiguro has taken this talent for surface restraint to new levels. In *The Unconsoled* and *When We Were Orphans*, he withheld not only certain superficial narrative satisfactions—a type of purposeful dramatic event—but also external elements, the frame or context that might ground his stories in a world we recognize as familiar and true. It's as if he were playing a daring game, testing what could be removed from fiction without sacrificing its life force. Do we need to know where *The Unconsoled* takes place? Or what ails the town at its center? Do we need to know why Christopher Banks, the protagonist of *When We Were Orphans*, believes he will succeed in finding his lost parents in Shanghai, or why the expatriate community believes he can save them? Do we need to see exactly the line between story and fantasy, between what is fictionally "real" and a character's imagined reality? What, exactly, constitutes a fiction's vital organs?

The questions surrounding his latest, mesmerizing book, *Never Let Me Go*, would be formulated rather differently. Here, through the narration of a 31-year-old named Kathy H., we are presented with a hermetic, fully imagined reality of the recent past—one whose details are as precise, as simultaneously petty and deeply significant, as Stevens's insufficiently polished fork or stray dustpan and brush—and yet it is a world almost wholly detached from the recent past as we know it. In other words, we are provided here with context, if only partially so, but it is context counter to fact. How, then, do we know our own reality? And what, indeed, might it be to see again and utterly askew what we thought we already knew?

The novelist Peter Carey has said that in writing *Oscar and Lucinda* he felt himself to be writing a science fiction of the past; in his new novel Ishiguro could be said to do the same for the present, marrying the narrative strategies of his earlier and later fictions. We are set down in a world at once familiar and unfamiliar, as in his enigmatic novels, like *The Unconsoled*; at the same time *Never Let Me Go*, in tenor, powerfully recalls *The Remains of the Day*. But the stakes for Kathy are dramatically higher even than for Stevens: He is concerned for his dignity and his fulfillment; she, for her very life.

We are told, a page before the story even begins, that we are in England in the late 1990s; but this could be a purely disarming strategy. (As a computer scientist recently pointed out to me, why should Internet users ever believe that we've entered a secure location just because a pop-up box assures us we have? To trust a few words on a screen, or page, smacks of a perilous credulity.) Before we begin reading, we have in hand, we feel, a comprehensive set of useful guidelines—the guidelines of our lived experience. Indeed, when Kathy informs us in the novel's second sentence

Claire Messud is the author, most recently, of The Hunters *(Harvest), a pair of novellas.*

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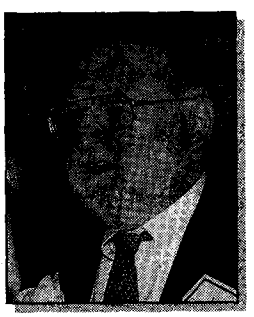

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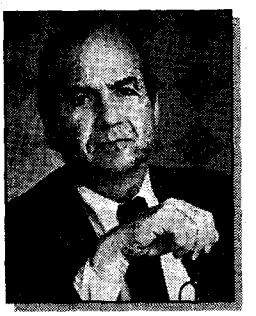

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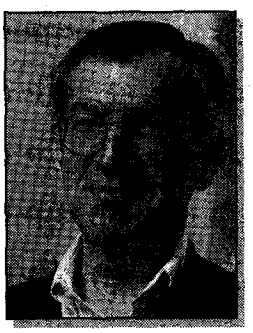

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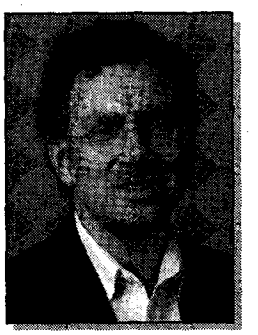

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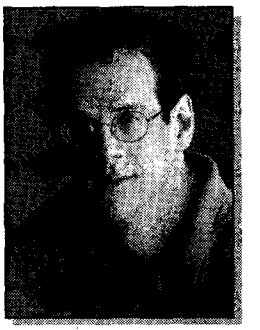

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that she has been "a carer now for over eleven years," we "naturally" assume she's at work in Britain's healthcare system, tending to the elderly or infirm. That this is an insufficient understanding is, within the paragraph, abundantly clear: The people for whom she cares are termed "donors," and a passing reference to their "fourth donation" suggests that this is not a one-off bout of purposeful generosity on their part (a kidney for a cousin, bone marrow for an ailing child) but a full-blown career. Still, surrounded by so much that is familiar, by Kathy's calm conversational tone ("Anyway, I'm not making any big claims for myself. I know carers, working now, who are just as good and don't get half the credit. If you're one of them, I can understand how you might get resentful"), we assume that in spite of our slight disorientation, we will soon know where we stand.

What follows—Kathy's reminiscences of her years at a boarding school called Hailsham, and of her minute altercations and reconciliations with friends, in particular with two of them named Ruth and Tommy—is, in the context of our known world and the real past, of an indescribable banality. Ishiguro captures brilliantly the local rules and rituals of his imaginary institution, the cliques and spats and tiny treasured moments; but this involves Kathy relaying to us in prolonged detail the incident of Ruth's fancy pencil case, the disappearance of Kathy's favorite cassette tape and so forth. For a good third of the novel, we relive these events as if trapped at the dinner table with our suddenly voluble adolescent children—that is to say, with a mixture of mild interest, concern and deep exasperation. But over these childish dramas hangs an ever-growing sense of menace. Kathy observes:

> So you're waiting, even if you don't quite know it, waiting for the moment when you realize that you really are different to them; that there are people out there, like Madame, who don't hate you or wish you any harm, but who nevertheless shudder at the very thought of you—of how you were brought into this world and why—and who dread the idea of your hand brushing against theirs.... It's like walking past a mirror you've walked past every day of your life, and suddenly it shows you something else, something troubling and strange.

This is, indeed, the effect of Kathy's narrative itself, as we learn what lies behind her urgent prattling: that she and her fellow students are, like others in similar institutions around the country, clones, created and raised to adulthood in order to become multiple organ donors. As one of their most outspoken teachers, or "guardians," informs them, in response to their typical teenage fantasizing, "None of you will go to America, none of you will be film stars. And none of you will be working in supermarkets as I heard some of you planning the other day. Your lives are set out for you."

In this new context, of course, the mirror reflects a different reality, and the squabbles and triumphs of children become the high points of their lives, become life itself. Not far beyond the gates of school, they are destined for donation and ultimately death, or "completion," as it is delicately called. Just as Stevens has lived his adulthood entirely within the grounds of Darlington Hall (so much so that even a junket of a few days seems to flummox him), so too these people have lived entirely within Hailsham and The Cottages, a sort of halfway house where the older adolescents are sent to learn how to venture out into the world, engage with ordinary people and shop: "So we went to Woolworth's, and immediately I felt much more cheerful. Even now, I like places like that: a large store with lots of aisles displaying bright plastic toys, greeting cards, loads of cosmetics, maybe even a photo booth." They may be in England, but they are aliens in their country, a host of Frankenstein's children. They are fed upon literary classics, encouraged to make art and write poetry; they are civilized into an apparently meaningful humanity; and for what?

As in Beckett, Ishiguro's characters, in their detached world, show us a version of our own minute preoccupations and piddling distractions, and raise life's largest questions for us all. Is this all there is? Must it end so soon? Why strive? Why persist? What is it all for? At least the triumvirate of Kathy, Ruth and Tommy seem eventually to find an answer. Though not original—after all, these are not, by any definition, original people—it is nevertheless compelling: love. In time-honored tradition, they cling passionately to the belief that love will set them free; and needless to say, in time-honored tradition, love fails to oblige.

There is great dignity in Kathy H., and in her friends. There is also, ultimately, a pained and painful resignation. Like Stevens and Miss Kenton, the housekeeper who might have been his lover and wife, the Hailsham students seem, for all their musing, not to ask the essential question:

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Does it have to be this way? Rather as in Chekhov's *Three Sisters*, in which one might be forgiven for wondering just why the sisters cannot go to Moscow (as a friend of mine once insisted, they could surely get the train schedules, buy tickets and be off?), it is hard to understand fully why Kathy, Ruth and Tommy—or, for that matter, any of their cloned peers or acquaintances—don't contemplate escape, don't consider fleeing into the wider world—perhaps even to America.

This is a recurring element in Ishiguro's fiction; and surely an indispensable aspect of his vision. As he would have it, we are all trapped, whether in institutions or by mores or in a fantasy logic or in the past. His characters cannot jump out the window, because they do not believe there is anything outside the window to jump into. Even though we're told that Kathy lives in late-1990s England, in *Never Let Me Go* that place remains as flat as a stage set and as unreal, no possible Oz. This may be a radical and disturbing vision, of a world in which agency is so dramatically curtailed; but it is also an accurate rendition of the lives of so many, who are never granted the opportunity to imagine an alternative to the microcosm into which we have been born. Even when Kathy and Tommy seek out the powers that be to plead the case for their love, to beg a special dispensation, they do not dare to imagine any future to which a successful plea might entitle them; and that failure of imagination is perforce their *huis clos*.

If Ishiguro is a writer of uncommon restraint, he is also a writer who has increasingly made demands of his readers. Despite Kathy's easy and engaging narrative voice, this is true, too, of *Never Let Me Go*: A reader's patience and humility are required. Kathy H. is an ordinary young woman to whom circumstances have dealt an appalling fate; the ultimate emotional resonance of the book stems, at least in part, from that necessary ordinariness. And those who listen to her story will find themselves amply rewarded by this ambitious, peculiar and deeply affecting book. ■

Crouching Tiger

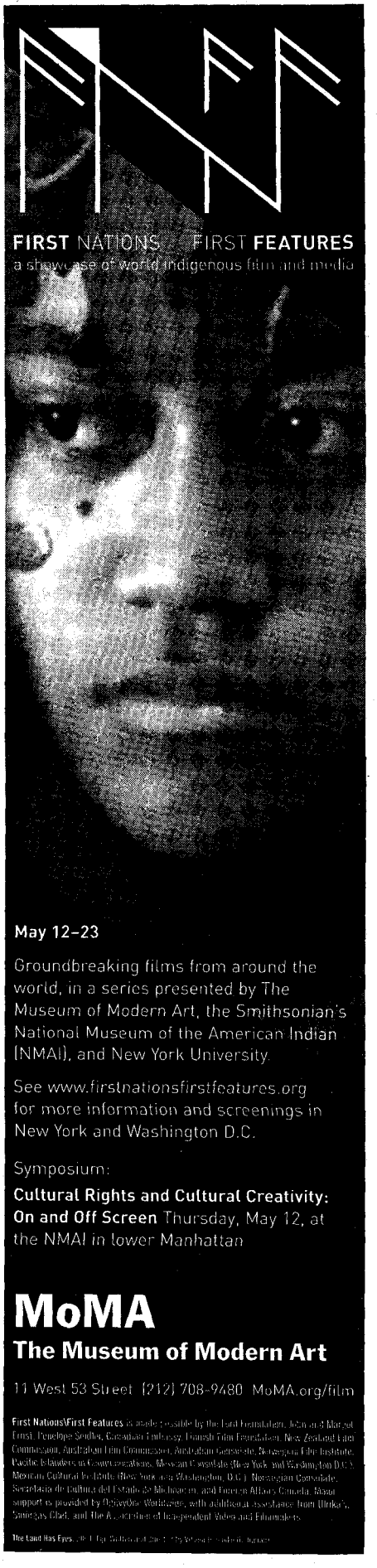
GENE SEYMOUR

THE ARTIFICIAL WHITE MAN: Essays on Authenticity.
By Stanley Crouch. Basic. 244 pp. $24.

Being Stanley Crouch is about as bruising a vocation as there is in what passes for—or remains of—polite literary society. One can't bring up the books and columns Crouch writes without careering into the jargon and aesthetics of street brawling. Unavoidably with Crouch, the notion of "brawling" gets framed in both literal and figurative terms. This past July, after Crouch assaulted the novelist and critic Dale Peck at a fashionable restaurant in New York's West Village, Crouch's former employer the *Village Voice* placed this "pimp slap" in the context of previous scuffles in public places, including one in the offices of the *Voice* that cost him his job many years ago. Sparring with Harry Allen, an African-American colleague, over the respective merits of hip-hop and jazz, Crouch put Allen in a chokehold. (Crouch, in case you haven't heard by now, believes hip-hop is a pestilence infecting and slowly killing everything it touches. "Scum of the earth" is among the nicer things he's said about "gangsta" rappers.) The more recent "pimp slap" was provoked by Peck's vitriolic pan of Crouch's novel *Don't the Moon Look Lonesome*, published some four years earlier in *The New Republic*. The skirmish gave the tabloid gossips a chew toy that lost its entertainment value after a day, if that long. In the grand cosmic scheme, it was just another thirty-second advertisement for Stanley Crouch's notoriety, a vainglorious diversion from his ongoing mission to set America's head straight on matters of race and culture.

For those of us who prefer those aspects of Crouch's public persona that let him be urbane, trenchant and illuminating—as when, say, he's a principal talking head for Ken Burns's recent PBS documentary *Unforgivable Blackness: The Rise and Fall of Jack Johnson*—all this shoving and slapping around is an unseemly, egregious waste of his time and ours. Also, it's re-

Gene Seymour is the film critic for Newsday.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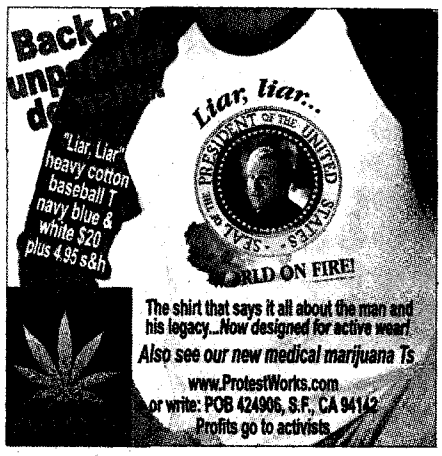
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dundant. When Crouch is incensed about something, his lush, ripe prose morphs into a bludgeon, attacking with such quick, unrelenting force that its target is initially too dazed to strike back in kind. You'd think that would be enough to cut an intimidating figure on the cultural scene, and most times it is. But when you add to this gadfly's cluttered portfolio his mission to advance the increasingly quixotic cause of jazz music through his consultant's gig at Jazz at Lincoln Center (and you could stuff yards of column space itemizing the critical tussles involving Crouch on jazz aesthetics), you're tempted to believe that it's easier to haul a baby grand piano on your back from the Bronx to Brooklyn than it is to hold the full-time job of being Stanley Crouch.

You also can't help but conclude that the strain of that full-time job brought about the mild stroke Crouch suffered late last year—from which he's recovered nicely enough to pick up where he left off at his *New York Daily News* columnist's post: blasting holes in liberal and black-nationalist orthodoxies, ganging up on hip-hop and so on. How long (oh, baby, how long) can he keep hammering his way through the zeitgeist's soft spots before he drops from exhaustion? Just talking about the extracurricular pugilism can wear you out, and its novelty, as Norman Mailer could attest, wears thin with age. These days one senses that even Crouch's longtime critics, the black cultural nationalists and hip-hop cognoscenti, have worn themselves out shouting "Sellout!" "Tom!" "Neocon!" and other epithets at Crouch's bearish frame. Maybe it's because the taunts either slide off his back or make him stronger. Or maybe his critics have finally noticed that, unlike other African-Americans tarred with the neoconservative brush, Crouch, like Mailer, isn't to be understood too quickly. Or, for that matter, classified too glibly.

Whatever the case, it's past time for Crouch and his audience, pro and con, to broaden the parameters of their dialogue. Which is why *The Artificial White Man* is a sight for sore eyes. This is Crouch's best, most expansive collection of essays since his first, *Notes of a Hanging Judge*, published in 1990. The two collections in between, *The All-American Skin Game, or, the Decoy of Race* (1995) and *Always in Pursuit* (1998), had their respective high points (in *Skin Game*, the inquiries into the O.J. Simpson trial, *The Bell Curve* and *Mr. Sammler's Planet*; in *Pursuit*, the re-examination of *Go Down, Moses*, the messianic urge to link John Ford's vision with Duke Ellington's). But for the most part, the pieces in those books stretched out riffs Crouch had already played to better effect in *Hanging Judge*, which will probably last longer than any of his other books because it now reads less like an inventory of hot-button provocations than the autobiography of a restless mind coming to terms with the consequences of breaking free from dogma and consensual hypocrisy.

The title of the new collection dares Crouch's baser critics to interpret it as self-description. But it's the subtitle, "Essays on Authenticity," that nails down the book's true purpose and brings into sharpest focus what Crouch, beneath the bluster, has really been up to all this time: investigating and challenging any and all notions of what is "authentic" in American life. And for "authentic" one could substitute "hip" or "bullshit-free" or whatever hip-hop euphemism enjoys the greatest currency at the moment. Media hoodoo and image politics may have helped Crouch become a celebrity. But he has never yielded in his distaste for superficiality. If you get him far enough away from the spotlight, it's even possible to hear Crouch call himself on his own bullshit. (When *Hanging Judge*'s blunt candor is turned inward, it's easy to see why even some who disagree violently with his opinions find it hard to stay mad at him for very long.)

So woe to those who think they've got Crouch figured out before they dive into *Artificial White Man*. Consider, for instance, his appreciation of John Singleton's *Baby Boy*. Those who have Crouch nailed down as a spoilsport when it comes to contemporary black pop culture doubtless believe he would have led the big, loud chorus of critics' boos that greeted Singleton's 2001 movie about coming of age amid sex and violence in South Central LA. Instead, Crouch praises the movie for not submitting to what he's long perceived as the "new minstrelsy" of hip-hop music videos, "where gold teeth, drop-down pants and tasteless jewelry abound." "Singleton," writes Crouch, "is after more than props. He questions the mores of his characters and shows young black men caught in ritual behavior that is about arrested development on one hand and bitter rage at their limitations on another.... At one point, with a tragic depth one would find exceptional in *any* American film, a character prays that he and his buddy be shown the way but, if they cannot be given a direction, the young man asks God to 'forgive us for being lost.'"

If it's possible for a commercial filmmaker to grow and reach for such depth and complexity, Crouch figures there's no

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excuse whatsoever for writers of books not to make similar leaps of conscience and consciousness. That's why the two most withering essays in *Artificial White Man*, "Segregated Fiction Blues" and the title essay, go medieval on authors who either evade or misuse America's cultural and ethnic complexity.

And, so we're clear, just because the volume on Crouch's customary rhetorical dynamics may be turned down a little in *Artificial White Man*, that doesn't mean the man always remembers to keep the restraints at hand:

> Writers may well have gone to integrated colleges with all manner of people, some of whom have remained their friends over the years. They may live in neighborhoods populated with various kinds of Americans.... These writers may make it their business to associate themselves with at least one version of those organizations bent on chopping down more trees in the poison forest of ethnic, sexual, religious and class bigotry. Some of their best friends might be—you name it. But when they sit down to write about this big country, they punk out....
>
> That is now the norm: punking out. Hiding under the bed. Walking beneath a flag of white underwear stained fully yellow by liquefied fear....

At which point, the reader will be tempted to shout, "Awww, man! Why'd you have to go there? You were doing fine up till then." This isn't the last time the stained-yellow underwear comes up, and it's at such points and others strewn throughout the book that one's threshold for Crouch's freewheeling attack gets pressed to the breaking point. Still, when Crouch is focused on the task at hand, especially in the title essay's slow-hand evisceration of David Shields's *Black Planet*, it is fearsomely thrilling to behold.

To Crouch, Shields's highly subjective account of the 1994–95 Seattle SuperSonics season constitutes one of the bad things that happen when good writers grasp for authenticity or, as Crouch sees it, the notion of "being—or not being—what [Shields] calls 'cool.'" Reading Shields confess his fascination, from his relatively secure, petit-bourgeois white standpoint, with flamboyant, often belligerent and wealthy black basketball superstars like Gary Payton, Crouch finds that Shields is avoiding, far more than confronting, his own bullshit.

As far as Shields is concerned, Crouch writes:

> The black American's greatest refinements are expressed not in medicine, science, education, the arts and technology, but in shorts, tennis shoes and a sleeveless jersey, "talking trash" on the polished hardwood of a basketball court, sort of a flattened bush where primordial updates are available to the eye. Shields attacks this tendency in himself and others to reduce black men to athletic flesh held in place by the meat hooks of Caucasian projections. But, like a blacksmith addicted to making the same form over and over, he continues to forge new meat hooks and hoist these men into place.

You probably have to read both the "Artificial White Man" essay and "Blues in More Than One Color: The Films of Quentin Tarantino" more than once to figure out why Crouch thinks Tarantino is a lot "cooler"—more authentic?—in his engagement with the black psyche than Shields. The Tarantino essay does cover a lot of real estate. (It's a raw, rambling and altogether remarkable virtuoso solo that started out, Crouch writes, as a letter responding to Daniel Mendelsohn's dismissal of Tarantino's *Kill Bill* in the *New York Review of Books*.) It might help to skip ahead to the part of the essay that deals with Tarantino's overlooked *Jackie Brown* (1997), which gets its most thorough and incisive appreciation in these pages. Crouch correctly sees that what had been hyped and is still seen in some quarters as Tarantino's homage to the "blaxploitation" movies of the 1970s was in fact a sly, humane subversion of those knockabout thrillers. Crouch's swaggering belligerence may sell tickets to the chattering classes. But critics should always be judged finally on what and how they love. And in the Tarantino essay and his appreciations elsewhere in the book of Jorge Luis Borges, Danzy Senna, Saul Bellow and ZZ Packer, his enthusiastic passion feels so genuine that it further diminishes the things and trends he despises.

Then again, Crouch might not always be as intractable as he seems toward his targets. After all, he's considerably softened the acerbic disdain he expressed toward Spike Lee in *Hanging Judge*. (In *Always in Pursuit*, he said nice things about Lee's *Bamboozled* and *He Got Game*.) As for Toni Morrison, another culture hero roughed up in *Hanging Judge*, Crouch's misgivings toward her work are compressed in *Artificial White Man* into the following inquiry:

> For some time, I have wondered why Toni Morrison makes so little of the black female expression that she knows in person.

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> Oprah Winfrey and Leontyne Price are supposedly two of her best friends. Each woman soared from humble beginnings to conquer areas of life that have been touched by few people of any color in America. What they have lived and know and must talk about goes far, far beyond the fictionalized gossip that forms the basis for a lot of fiction. But Morrison prefers to keep her characters down on the farm, and we are still waiting for the hot mama who has high thoughts.

As long as the brother is being prescriptive, let's flip a suggestion of our own back to him. Why doesn't he get out of his study more often and do some of the on-the-scene reporting that gave *Hanging Judge* its brighter moments? Imagine what would happen if the probing subjectivity that informed such *Hanging Judge* essays as "Atlanta Reconstructed," his sensitive reading of the city's mood in the midst of its 1979–1981 child murders, and "Body and Soul," his incomparable meditation on classics and culture during the 1983 Umbria Jazz Festival in Italy, were brought to the Michael Jackson trial in Los Angeles. Crouch has been writing about Jackson's physical and cultural transformations since the 1980s. There's yet another essay about the King of Pop in *Artificial White Man*; this one focuses on his noisy financial set-to with the Sony Music executives Jackson accused of racism. If this were a more heroic era in journalism (say, the 1960s), a magazine editor would have put Crouch on a plane for the left coast weeks ago and let his sensibility roam wild and free amid the day-to-day absurdities within and beyond the courtroom where Jackson's trial takes its jagged course. If Mailer could bear witness to a moon shot, why can't Crouch do something similar with a moonwalker's most perilous high-wire act? ■

FILMS

Compromising Positions

STUART KLAWANS

ENRON: THE SMARTEST GUYS IN THE ROOM • ANOTHER ROAD HOME • PALINDROMES

Your movie reviewer has been reading Colin MacCabe's excellent book on Jean-Luc Godard and pondering its discussion of France after World War II. As MacCabe describes it, this was a time when a loose, intergenerational group of writers, teachers, artists and bohos could decide that political change lay down the road of cultural criticism—in particular, criticism of the popular art of film.

The contemporary American mind recoils in disbelief. In a society that is now thoroughly dominated by political niche-marketing and teledigitized mendacity, we strain to hope, like the old *Cahiers du Cinéma* crowd, that film might still be made to seize the world and change it. Granted, Godard carries on, despite everything. His later films and videos are both a meditation on the ultimate failure of the *Cahiers* project and an audacious continuation of the struggle. Yet the idiosyncrasy of his work, which once made it a model for younger artists and critics, today serves only to mark how far we've been pushed from the goal.

I lay these thoughts before you not to call down gloom but to introduce three current films that do try to change the world, or at least incite the kind of discussion that promises change. One is a pretty good example of the liberal exposé à la mode. (Why not a left-wing exposé? We'll get to that.) The second is a version of the now ubiquitous my-personal-journey video, though distinguished by a superior level of intelligence, honesty and political sophistication. The third is an ostentatiously whacked-out, button-pushing fiction, which some viewers will see as a counsel of despair. To me, it represents one possible way forward.

Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room provides the useful service of walking you through the biggest business-political scandal of a very young century. Although the film will probably make few converts—again, that problem of niche-marketing—it will at least invigorate an existing constituency against the next depredation, while allowing them the small victory of mocking the perpetrators of the last.

Writer-director Alex Gibney cracks all the standard jokes of the modern activist

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documentarian—tossing in an ironic snatch of pop music here, a patch of funky old horror movie there—to liven up his mix of talking-head interviews and C-SPAN footage. As he perhaps realizes, his gags are not half as boffo as those of the acknowledged trendsetter, Michael Moore. (I note that Gibney wisely refrains from attempting any of Moore's performance art.) That said, *Enron* does exhibit some of Moore's flair for digging up astounding footage—such as an in-house promotional video in which Enron's Jeffrey Skilling both spoofed and celebrated his dubious accounting practices. ("We call it HFV," he chortled. "Hypothetical Future Value trading!") Gibney also deserves credit for tracing a clear line through Enron's tangled history, a task in which he is greatly helped by his reliance on the book *The Smartest Guys in the Room*, by Peter Elkind and Bethany McLean.

But he is also hurt by these two *Fortune* magazine writers, whose on-camera comments frame the discussion in personal terms. At the beginning of the film, McLean says the Enron story is "really a human tragedy." At the end, she claims it was about strayed idealists: "people who thought they were changing the world" by agitating for completely unregulated markets. In between, *Enron* worries over the question of whether Kenneth Lay and Jeffrey Skilling truly meant to perpetrate an enormous fraud or were drawn by slow degrees into criminality through the dark forces of peer pressure and intellectual pride. You might as well ask whether Al Capone expected to harm anyone when he set out to rule the bootleggers. As an organizing theme for political inquiry, the film's key question is meaningless (and is sometimes exposed as such by material that Gibney himself dredges up). As a subject for fleshing out, the question sets Gibney up for failure. He never gets within a mile of Lay's or Skilling's personality.

So, looking for a different model for changing the world through film, I turn to *Another Road Home*, which is all personality. Written and directed by Danae Elon, it is an account of the filmmaker's efforts to forge new ties, and question the existing ones, between two families, both intimate to her and both expatriated, though in different ways.

The first of the families is Israeli. Elon is the daughter of the noted author Amos Elon and his wife, Beth, who brought her up in Jerusalem. The second family is Palestinian. At its head is a man the Elons knew as Musa Abdullah: a resident of Battir, in the West Bank, who came by the Elon house in 1967 looking for work and was hired as the caregiver of 1-year-old Danae. He had eleven children of his own but seems to have loved her as well as any of them, and spent more time with her, too.

Over the years, the Elons lost touch with Musa. But after September 11, 2001, Danae (now a New Yorker) began to wonder about the fortunes of his grown children in the United States, some of whom lived nearby in Paterson, New Jersey. So she looked them up, which turned out to be a little harder than she'd expected. Their name, she learned, is not Abdullah but Obeidallah. Their patriarch, the surrogate father to whom she was so close, is actually Mahmoud. "'Musa' is easier for Israelis to say," his son Naser explained with a shrug. "They would have mispronounced 'Mahmoud.'"

This is only the beginning of the revelations—or should I say the cordial challenges?—that make *Another Road Home* so bracing. It is one thing to acknowledge in writing, as Amos Elon has done, the unjust imbalance of power between Palestinians and Israelis. It is something else to sit on the floor with a man who is your shadow brother, as Danae sits with Naser in his new pharmacy in Paterson, and own up to an imbalance of concern. "I would come to your house with my father and see you had a guitar. And I would wonder, Why does she have a guitar? Why does she have all these books? Because I didn't have these things. And I was curious about your life. What I want to know is, Were you curious about us?"

"No," she says, as slowly as one syllable can be produced.

Just as she opens herself to the Obeidallahs' questioning, so does Danae in turn question her parents, who to their great credit cooperate wholeheartedly in being unsettled. Danae springs on her mother Mahmoud's phone number in Battir, then captures Beth's nervous gestures at once more hearing his voice. Later, when Mahmoud comes with great difficulty to visit in the United States, Danae captures her father's pained and abortive efforts to make conversation over lunch. There can be no normal social intercourse between Israelis and Palestinians, Amos has told her, because the political division is so terrible, so overwhelming. To which Danae replies, with a quiet forcefulness possible only in the closest of families, that she is now concerned with addressing this social division. She will not let politics delay her.

Another Road Home is as modest in demeanor as its filmmaker but also as steadfast. It confronts hard facts willingly, but it does so with warmth and respect for each

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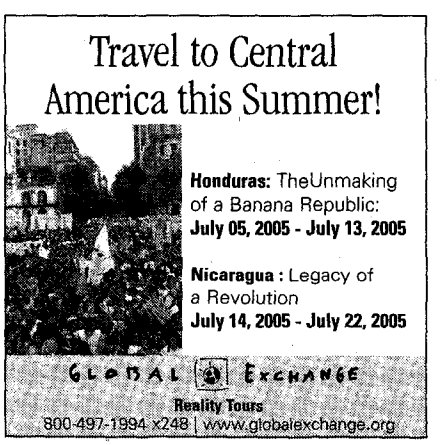
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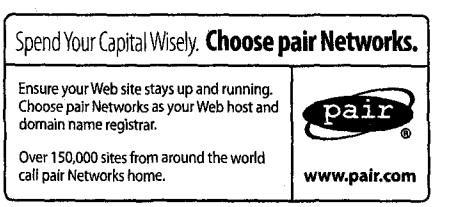
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of its characters. There is something deeply nourishing about this picture—and not just because the Obeidallah and Elon families are either preparing or consuming food in practically every scene. *Another Road Home* satisfies because it goes beyond advocating change; it is itself the record of change.

Still, a question lingers. We have all bumped up against people (close relatives, maybe) whose beliefs do not yield to respectful prodding but only become more rocklike. We have all, at one time or another, turned stony ourselves. This, too, is a hard fact that needs confronting, which Todd Solondz sets out to do in *Palindromes*.

Like Solondz's other features (*Welcome to the Dollhouse*, *Happiness*, *Storytelling*), *Palindromes* is an uncanny balancing act, poised at all times between grotesquerie and realism, humor and agony, scorn and sympathy. It rarely allows you a single response. It often holds you back from responding at all, so cool is its manner and so outrageous its subject matter, which in this case exceeds Solondz's past repertory of adolescent misery, sexual anxiety and suburban social aggression. This time, venturing out of his usual New Jersey settings, he risks emotional engagement with the Christian right, as experienced by a runaway Jewish girl who sympathizes with its antiabortion agenda even at its most violent.

The girl, Aviva, is played by a succession of performers. There's nothing inherently odd about this; filmmakers often cast different actors to portray a character at different ages. But Solondz does more. His multiplying Avivas include a boy (Will Denton), a much older woman (Jennifer Jason Leigh) and, in a key sequence, an abundantly fleshy young black woman (Sharon Wilkins). This latter choice is particularly nervy, since Wilkins has the look of the stereotypical gospel shouter, and Aviva at this stage has been taken in by rural evangelists, who tour their variously damaged foster children as a song-and-dance act for Jesus.

By putting Wilkins into this sequence, Solondz tacitly overcomes the incongruity between Aviva and her new family; he gets you closer to these people than you might have gone otherwise. At the same time, the casting serves as a distancing device. I thought of Hitchcock's explanation for having shot *Psycho* in black and white: Had it been in color, nobody could have stomached the blood. Had one actress embodied Aviva in *Palindromes*, maybe nobody could have stomached the intensity of her suffering.

There is also a third reason for Solondz's trick: It tests the disillusionment of a character, Mark Wiener (Matthew Faber), who serves almost as a mouthpiece for the filmmaker. People don't change, Mark says toward the end of *Palindromes*. They like to think they do, but they don't. This certainly would be true of Aviva, who from earliest childhood has been single-mindedly bent on having children. And yet, having heard Mark out, she walks off and morphs from Jennifer Jason Leigh into Shayna Levine.

Written in a style of scrupulous meanness and directed so as to confound every automatic reaction, *Palindromes* is as far as you can get from activism. But it is, even so, a remarkable act of political filmmaking, one that acknowledges the stubborn impenetrability of ourselves and our society and yet manages to wedge open in them a little space for thought.

Maybe we're long past the stage of film culture that *Cahiers* fostered, but we can at least look back and think that *Cahiers* might have recognized *Palindromes* as one of its own. Maybe we can't go forward as the *Cahiers* writers did, but Solondz, for one, suggests that our future has not been foreclosed. ■

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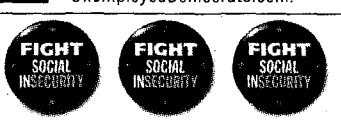

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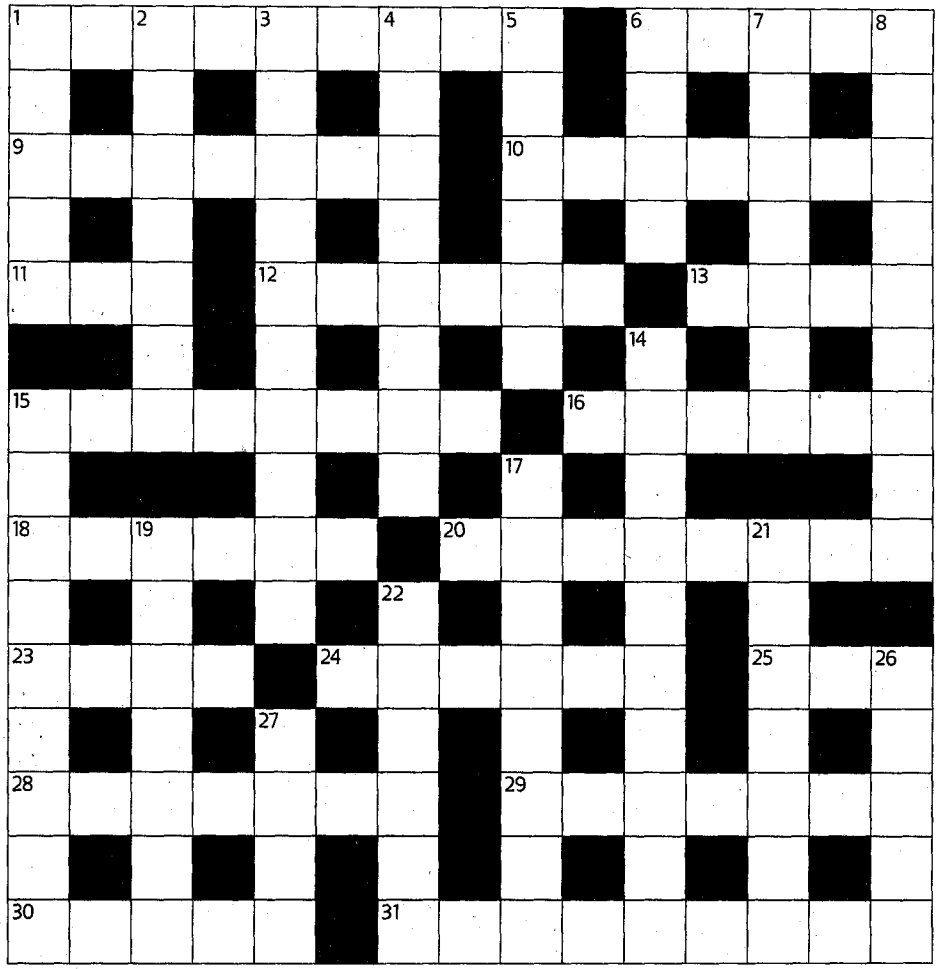
PUZZLE NO. 2987

FRANK W. LEWIS



ACROSS

1 Not a cheap ring, or effrontery given to Robin's group, but it should play well. (5,4)

6 See 17 down

9 Usher in? Quite the contrary, but it's the thing lazy people are told to get. (4,3)

10 After a quiet start, sort of led around the frozen stuff to stalk a single flower. (7)

11 and **12** Any evening but Saturday and Sunday you might find a little guy like Galahad. (4,5)

13 This on the floor helps you see how things are laid out in the top landing. (4)

15 Be in less trouble, and you'll be easily understood. (8)

16 A good sign for some that there is something like a diamond in one (or two!). (6)

18 Breaking the ice, it's where you can find a lot of people in residential areas. (6)

20 Where *NOVA* teaches us to show how to make things over. (8)

23 On the same level as being divisible by two. (4)

24 Queen in a shipwreck, showing how some die when in dire straits. (6)

25 and **1** and **19** down A strike is considered not legal if you do! (3,5,3,4)

28 No. 8 at table, usually, but by the sound of it, you have to multiply everything—more than once! (3,4)

29 Gets out of bed? Makes light of things, rather! (7)

30 and **31** Do you get your footwear wet if you do? (One should be leery of them—and their forked tongues.) (5,9)

DOWN

1 See 25 across

2 State shortly where mine is confused as to the site of a decisive victory by the British. (7)

3 Saves up for a rainy day, when such as cattle get to slip badly around one point. (10)

4 Workers build them up, but shan't mistakenly get sick inside. (8)

5 A small department at high school relating to the ocean, as they say... (6)

6 ...with this having its ins and outs periodically. (4)

7 Some people may think of them as bugs, but you may see a taxi coming up when sick at one. (7)

8 Inelegant when scattered in the garden, perhaps. (9)

14 You probably don't invite many people in when you have this. (10)

15 Not exactly what a well-known sportscaster used to say as a mild expletive, and that's no bull, even for the worshipers! (6,3)

17 and **6** across Fairy dealing with poetry, found where one eats despite the elements here! (8,5)

19 See 25 across

21 The tribe that has only a beaten-up lean-to for accommodations, by the sound of it. (7)

22 Where one sleeps when on that on which runners might be found—though it's rather chaotic. (6)

26 Inquire inside, with the good man coming up with jobs to be done. (5)

27 Just what none but the brave deserve, as they say! (4)

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 2986

I	O	W	A	N	S	■	C	U	L	D	E	S	A	C
D	■	E	■	A	■	O	■	P	■	A	■	I	■	O
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N	■	R	■	A	■	N	■	N	■	T	■	E	■	I
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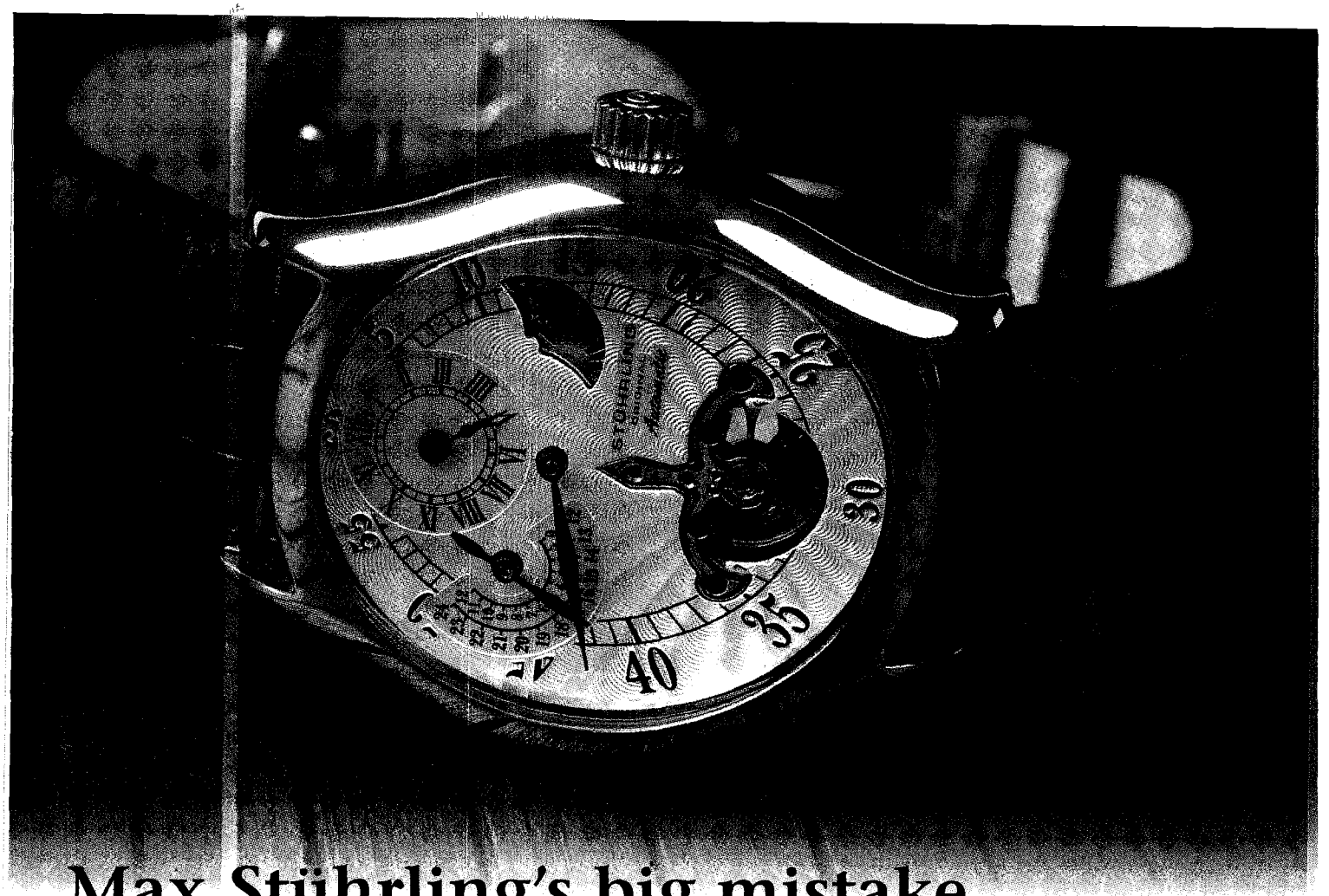
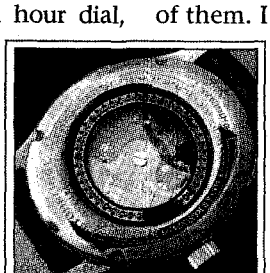


Max Stührling's big mistake

When quality isn't enough to take on the big guys.

The fine horologists (watchmakers) at Stührling just built a super luxury watch for this Christmas. Using one of the most complex regulator movements ever designed, they engineered the Regulator Series 3. With it's large separate minute dial and small hour dial, this watch was built to take on the likes of Rolex™ and Patek Phillipe™ and was to retail for $5,750. Well, Max made a mistake. The other luxury watch manufacturers had locked up the shelf space at the high end jewelers by offering large advertising contracts, so Max is left with 3,435 of these magnificent "Regulator Series 3" watches.

Max needs to liquidate these luxury watches so he came to us at NextTen. You see, NextTen has become synonymous with high quality watches at extraordinary values. We are offering the Regulator for a miraculous price—$349.75. Max is in tears, but he needs the cash. When the 3,435 watches are sold, that will be the end of them. I am keeping three for myself since I'm convinced that the rare design will make this watch sought after by collectors in years to come.



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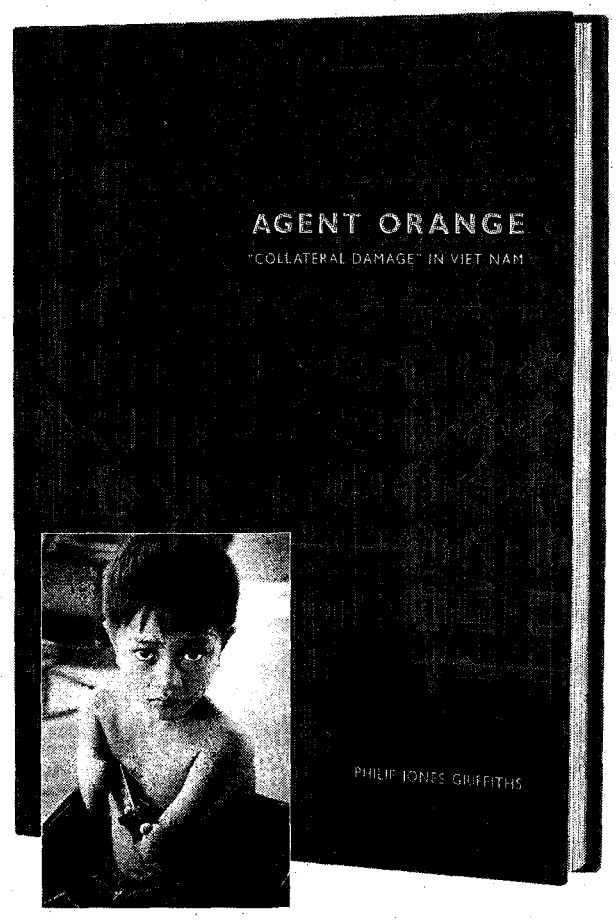

Philip Jones Griffiths served as president of Magnum Photos for five years. His epic 1971 work, *Vietnam Inc.*, changed American attitudes toward the war. *Agent Orange: "Collateral Damage" in Viet Nam* and his forthcoming *Viet Nam at Peace* stand as an epilogue to that great book—warranting Henri Cartier-Bresson's judgment: "Not since Goya has anyone portrayed war like Philip Jones Griffiths."

A Griffiths retrospective opens Sept 8th at Denise Bibro Fine Art, 529 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011, 212-647-7030.

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